

## **Charles Dodgson and Albury** **An Historical Background to Some of Lewis Carroll's Guildford Connections**

*Mark R Richards*

Albury is a village close to Guildford in an area steeped in history and abounding with Dodgson connections. To get to the crux of Charles Dodgson's connections with Albury, and possibly the reason why he moved the family home to Guildford, we need to begin with the banker and MP, Henry Drummond.

There is no reason to believe that Dodgson and Drummond ever met, but Drummond's importance to Albury's history is fundamental and a little investigation into his life will demonstrate that the quiet picturesque village, as it still is today, was actually an incubator of radical thought.

It would be a mistake to think that Dodgson was not inspired by the great views he observed on his walks or interested in the economic and political turmoil of his times just because he rarely comments on them in his diaries. I believe the activities taking place at Albury would have been of interest to him and they are worthy of exploration.

It was Andrew Drummond, Henry's great great uncle who founded Drummonds Bank, in which Henry was a partner. That bank still functions today as part of the Royal Bank of Scotland.

Henry was educated at Harrow and Christ Church, although did not take his degree. In addition to his role within the bank, he took an active interest in social affairs and matters of religion and politics. He became a member of parliament at 24 and was the MP for West Surrey for the last 13 years of his life.

In 1819 Drummond purchased the Albury Estate. It is difficult to date the house exactly, because it has undergone so many changes over the years. However most of what we see today is the result of major 19<sup>th</sup> century changes made to a mid 17<sup>th</sup> century house. Sir John Soane (who designed the bank of England) and the gothic revivalist Henry Hakewill (who built the Chapel at Rugby School) both made their mark, but the most interesting changes were made by Augustus Pugin and his builder George Myers, under Henry Drummond's direction.

Pugin, of course, is the man responsible for the decorative work at the Palace of Westminster. No doubt, as a member of Parliament, Drummond was aware of the work Pugin was carrying out at the new seat of government and so he was obviously the right man to remodel Albury Mansion.

The Mansion and the Village were originally much close together than they are today. One of the owners of the estate prior to Drummond's time, effectively demolished the houses of Albury and re-established the village a mile or so to the West at what was called Weston Street.

Drummond also engaged Pugin and Myers to carry out further work on the "new" village - and that is the Albury which Dodgson would have known and which still looks largely the same today. There is now little trace of the original village of Albury - apart from the old Parish Church, which was built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and is recorded in the Domesday book. Consequently, rather harder to move, although Drummond managed something like it.

So when Drummond acquired Albury, the Parish Church was actually on his grounds. Within 25 years of living there, Drummond not only remodelled his own house, but he commissioned two new places of worship to be built and oversaw the closure and subsequent restoration of the old Parish Church.

In December 1826, Drummond hosted a six-day conference of clergymen to study the scriptures concerning Christ's second coming. This might seem a rather strange act on behalf of a very

conservative man like Drummond, but it has to be seen in the context of the state of society at that time.

The industrial revolution had drawn people into the cities and the conditions of housing were deteriorating, whilst alcoholism and poor health were on the increase. In the country, workers were finding it increasingly difficult to afford decent accommodation and work was, for some, becoming harder to find. Political ideas, particularly democracy, were being discussed and reform was in the air. To many this all suggested that the foundations of society were collapsing. The remains of the old feudal system were disappearing, and to Drummond, this was seen to be to the detriment of everyone – not just the land-owners. His conservative views embraced the notion that with wealth and land-ownership comes responsibility – something which the world was not seeing too often with the new money generated by industry.

Many, who felt that they were living in an era of widening crisis, turned to apocalyptic writing and were drawn to prophetic preaching.

In particular, Edward Irving, a Scottish minister, preaching in London, attracted huge congregations with his apocalyptic pronouncements.

Drummond saw, in the work of Irving and others a context within which he could comprehend the deterioration of Society.

The 1826 conference was followed by four more annual gatherings, which led to the establishment of what is referred to as the Catholic Apostolic Church. The terms Irvingism and Irvingite Church were also used, although these are regarded as inaccurately implying the Church's connection with Edward Irving.

The conferences were chaired by Reverend Hugh McNeile, rector of the old Church at Albury. However McNeile did not support the eventual establishment of the Apostolic Church whose members were meeting regularly at Albury Mansion and, on occasion he preached against the movement and did this from the Parish Church.

Not surprisingly this caused a souring of relations between McNeile and Drummond.

The need for a suitably sized permanent place of worship led to the building of the Apostles' Chapel just a few hundred yards from Albury Mansion. Its costs was £15,000, paid for by Drummond, and designed in a gothic revival style by architect William Brooks, and incorporating a dramatic rose window by Pugin. Attached to the building is an octagonal chapter house from which the Apostolic Church's world-wide activities were co-ordinated.

Drummond now had no connection with the old Church and an uncomfortable relationship with its rector. Add to this the fact that the fabric of the old Church was rapidly deteriorating and we can start to see why a new Parish Church in Albury might be needed.

There was some local protest to the idea of closing the old church and building a new one – mainly from local poet and philosopher, Martin Tupper. However with a little political manoeuvring and Drummond offering to pay for the construction and providing the land, the new Church was built.

This was also designed by William Brooks, but in a more Romanesque style.

The last service at the old Church took place in 1841, although it did not stand empty for long.

Restoration of the building soon began – partly by Pugin who turned a section of it into a mortuary chapel for the Drummond family.

McNeile moved on to Liverpool in 1834 and eventually became Dean of Ripon. One might be led to wonder if there is a Dodgson connection here, however, McNeile did not arrive in Ripon until shortly after Charles Dodgson Senior had passed away. McNeile's replacement at Albury, John Hooper, was the first rector of the new Church, subsequently replaced by Drummond's nephew George Raymond Portal. Records suggest that Portal took over in 1858, although a list of Rectors in the Church gives it as 1857.

Portal was born in 1827, educated at Rugby School and at Christ Church, gaining his BA in 1849 and his MA in 1852. It has been suggested in several places that Dodgson and Portal were friends from their Rugby days and somehow that friendship led to Dodgson's house-hunting in the Guildford area, after his father passed away and a new family home was required.

However, with five years difference in their ages, not surprisingly Portal's and Dodgson's times at Rugby did not coincide, nor, of course, did they at Christ Church. Portal seems unlikely to be the connection in spite of the fact this is often suggested.

We may never find out exactly why Dodgson chose Guildford or be able fully to explain the diary entry for 9 August 1868 which included the words; "Our ideas for a 'home' seem inclined to the neighbourhood of Guildford. I think of going down and looking at it, Albury, Dorking, etc."

Charles might easily have chosen Guildford and Dorking from maps or directories, but it is rather curious that he should specifically mention Albury. Why Albury and not Merrow, for example?

Perhaps the explanation lies with the Duke of Northumberland.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Northumberland was Algernon George Percy. He was Lord Lovaine until 1865 then Earl Percy until 1867 when his father died and he became the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke. In 1845, as Lord Lovaine he married Henry Drummond's daughter Louisa and upon Drummond's death in 1860 he inherited the Albury Estate.

The Duke's eldest son was Henry George Percy, who was educated, as you might expect, at Christ Church.

Charles Dodgson would have known Henry Percy at Christ Church and most likely taught him at some stage. From later letters and diary entries we know Dodgson and Percy remained friends over a long period, so it is certainly possible, if not likely, that Dodgson had heard of the charms of Albury through Percy and that is why he chose the area as a suitable house-hunting ground.

On 14 August 1868 Dodgson wrote in his diary "... walked by Merrow over Newland downs (the views from which are magnificent) through some very picturesque lanes, arched trees, into Albury, where I called at the Rectory and found Mrs. Portal at home ..." and of the Rectory and its inhabitants he wrote "It is a charming old house, in a very pretty garden and mine host and hostess are very pleasant and hospitable".

Mine host was, of course, Reverend George Raymond Portal. That reference to mine host and hostess being pleasant enforces the idea that Portal and Dodgson did not know each other, prior to the latter's first visit to Albury, but it is entirely likely that it was through the Christ Church connection, or even through Percy, that Dodgson was introduced to the Portals which enabled him to stay at the Rectory as a guest.

After a few days searching and three nights at the Portals, Dodgson found the Chestnuts in Guildford and saw it as the likely new home.

A few days later Dodgson's Aunt Lucy and his sister Frances came down to see the property and the final decision was made.

Dodgson made many other visits to Albury and the surrounding area, and generally on foot.

In April 1869, just a few months after the Dodgson family moved into the Chestnuts, the following note appears in Dodgson's diary;

Last Sunday I walked over to Albury Park, and called on Lord Percy (who had written hoping I would come some day). I found him there, and was introduced to his father and mother, who seem very pleasant and unaffected, but I did not see the bride.

The father was the 6<sup>th</sup> Duke and the mother was Drummond's daughter, Louisa. The Bride was Henry's wife of less than four months, Edith.

Dodgson, very quickly, started to establish his social circle.

Dodgson retained his friendship with the Portals and visited them on other occasions. Reverend George Portal remained as Rector of St Peter and St Paul from 1857 and 1871, and during this time he brought about numerous changes to the church and had a profound influence on society.

Just a few months before Portal was first visited by Dodgson at his Albury Rectory, he was engaged in a rather interesting enterprise. Just as Drummond had been concerned by the declining state of the nation and had sought a solution in the 1820s, Portal, 30 years later was equally moved to act.

Portal's contribution to societal improvement was to establish a Friendly Society. That is, a financial institution, set up for the good of its members. On the one hand encouraging them to save and on the other providing a form of assurance against illness, making available a sum for funeral expenses and establishing a fund to offer a form of pension.

The organisation was initially referred to as the Surrey County Deposit Benefit Club. Its immediate success and rapid expansion into other counties saw that name quickly change to the National Deposit Friendly Society. The Society still exists today although under the shortened name National Friendly Society.

Portal was the Society's first chairman and remained involved in it until his death. Three other early trustees are also worth mentioning at this point. The first is Thomas Hughes, author of Tom Brown's School Days – whom Portal knew from his Rugby days, although Dodgson did not.

Then there is Dodsworth Haydon, whom Dodgson knew very well; Haydon, living in the house next to the Chestnuts, going up castle hill.

And, perhaps, not surprisingly, another trustee and its first President was Algernon, 6<sup>th</sup> Duke of Northumberland.

With the passing of Henry Drummond in 1860 and Portal's moving on in 1871, one cannot imagine that Albury played host to such political movers and shakers again. Considering the peaceful village of Albury, today, it is remarkable to see the influence that came from this area and these people in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Is it any surprise that Dodgson was drawn to it?

Dodgson returned to Albury after Portal left. One cannot tell how often, but a later entry in his diary reveals that he spent an afternoon with the Percy family at Albury Mansion in April 1897. Showing the daughters various puzzles and teaching one of them, Mary, his game Lanrick.

The Apostles' Chapel still stands, but remains something of a mystery. Without going into the full history of the Church, when it was created, 12 apostles were appointed, but no mechanism was put in place to replace them when they died. It wasn't deemed necessary with the imminent second advent. It was only the apostles who were authorised to ordain ministers, so after the last apostle died no further ministers were ordained and the Church went into decline. Currently there are no ministers. The Church at Albury is still maintained in preparation for the second-coming, however, it is almost impossible for anyone who is not associated with the Church to gain access.

Whether Dodgson actually went into the Church or had discussions with any of the clergy we don't know. But we do know that he was not ignorant of it. In his diary entry for 8 July 1864 he refers to a long talk he had on Irvingism with Sir Henry Parnell, one who regularly attended an Irvingite place of worship.

But more importantly his diary entry for 22 July 1872 states:

Arthur Hughes came over for the day and we took a splendid walk together: "Fairy Land" "The Silent Pool", the Irvingite Church, Shere and so to Dorking and back by train.

The "Fairy Land" Dodgson referred to was a wooded area East of Guildford near Merrow Downs and Newlands Corner.

Newlands Corner still has the magnificent views that Dodgson describes and, from the right spot, one can see the village of Albury nestling down below.

Nearby Silent Pool, and the smaller one below it, called Sherborne Pond, still retain some of the magic that drew Dodgson and many other Victorians to them. The pools are fed from the North end by a small stream of water which has been filtered through the chalky soil – giving the water its clear and sometimes slightly blue appearance. Dodgson visited on many occasions taking friends and other family members with him and stopping for tea at the pretty Silent Pool Cottage. No tea is offered at the Cottage these days, but the recently opened gin distillery, which draws water from the Pool, is a suitable substitute.

Tennyson was also enchanted by Silent Pool, although he discovered it later than Dodgson. There are numerous myths and legends surrounding the Pool. The most famous was promoted by Martin Tupper – mentioned earlier as the man who protested against the relocation of the church at Albury. This particular myth concerns a young maiden who was bathing in the Pool one day when the young King John on his horse spotted her. Whilst trying to defend her modesty she sought refuge in a deeper part of the pond, became tangled in the weed and drowned.

Legend says the young maiden still visits Silent Pool on the same day each year. She is seen to disrobe and descend into the pond before a cantering of hooves is heard, followed by the futile splashing of water, which seals her fate yet again.

For the Carrollian tourist, there are a few other minor places of note. Just opposite the entrance to the new Church in Albury, one can see a memorial to Louisa Drummond, who, incidentally is buried in Westminster Abbey. Inside the Church there are several things to see, including Portal's name in the list of rectors, by the entry chamber. There is a plaque referring to the National Deposit Friendly

Society and their contribution to the Church and the Duke of Northumberland's family are acknowledged in several places.

Another place which Dodgson referred to in his diaries is the Church of St Martha on the Hill which can be seen clearly from Albury as one walks back into the village. The Old Rectory – where Carroll stayed with Portal on his first visit to the area still stand, although now a private residence.

Albury Mansion has now been converted into luxury apartments, so hard to gain access, but the grounds are interesting and the old Church is open to the public. One other minor Carroll connection is that some of Jonathan Millar's BBC TV production of *Alice* from the 1960s was filmed at Albury Park.

© *Mark R Richards, 2021*