

Charles Chapman 1829 - 1905

Charles Chapman was born on 8 June 1829 at Devonport, Devon, the sixth of the thirteen children of William Chapman, a Devonport solicitor, and his wife Charlotte Prowse. Charles was baptised at Stoke Damerel, the parish church for Devonport, on 5 July 1829. He was presumably educated locally but details are not known. In 1851, at age 21, he was working as an Attorney's Articled Clerk, most probably with his father. However at some stage in the next few years Charles decided to enter the Church. He went up to Christ Church College, Cambridge c. 1855, achieving his BA in 1858 and receiving his MA in 1862. He was ordained deacon in 1858 by the Bishop of Winchester, and then priest the following year. From 1860 to 1870 he was in the Royal Navy as a Chaplain and Naval Instructor, seeing service in the Mediterranean, around the West Coast of Africa, Australia and China. Then in 1870 he was appointed Vicar of Church Coniston in the Diocese of Carlisle, where he remained until his death in 1905. Church Coniston is in the English Lake District - then in Lancashire, now, since 1974, in Cumbria.

In 1866 Charles married Clara Elizabeth Edwards whose father William was a Store Keeper in HM Dockyards, first in Devonport and later in Portsmouth. Charles and Clara are recorded as having only one child, Charles William Beever Chapman, born 5 July 1876 at the Parsonage, Church Coniston.

Charles' arrival in Church Coniston coincided with a peak of prosperity in the community, and the settling in the vicinity of wealthy patrons, including from 1875 the writer and critic John Ruskin, who took up residence at Brantwood, just across Lake Coniston. One reason for the prosperity was the development of local copper mines by the Barratt family who established themselves in Coniston in the 1820's and 30's. The Barratts, together with other families closely linked with them (Hext, Petherick) were of Cornish origin and it's interesting to speculate on whether they influenced the appointment of a West Country vicar.

Charles was dissatisfied with the church (effectively a chapel) which he inherited, as affording 'miserable accommodation, comfortless sittings, bad ventilation'. He therefore set about raising funds and soliciting support for a new 'splendid' church. The original conception was for a Victorian mock gothic edifice of far greater proportions than the existing chapel. In the event economics dictated a more modest 'restoration' which was completed in 1891. The present day church is largely the creation of Charles Chapman. The new church was consecrated by Dr. Harvey Goodwin, Bishop of Carlisle, on 17th November 1891, and dedicated to St. Andrew.

John Ruskin spent his last decades at Brantwood and after his death in January 1900 was buried in Coniston churchyard, at his own request, instead of Westminster Abbey. Charles Chapman conducted his funeral service.

Charles himself died on 2 November 1905 and is buried beside his wife in the churchyard, near the east end of the church.