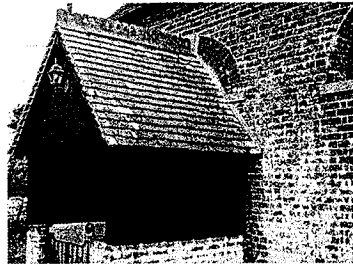


TALES FROM THE HILLS

(Ashmansworth and Crux Easton)



A regrettable row has simmered for centuries over the 12th century church in Crux Easton. Someone knocked it down in the 1770s and built a brand new one in the fashionable Georgian style.

A century later, a Mrs Wake of Manor Farm took it upon herself to refurbish the church. Among other changes, she bricked up the old door and cut a new one in the south wall, thrusting a rather Gothic porch through a round Georgian window. You can still see the join.

The rector at that time, the Revd William Caudwell, refused to have anything to do with this. He wrote to the diocese: "Mr Wake collected and kept the money – it was done entirely against my wish as I hoped in a few years' time to have had a better and more church-like building, as the present one is more like a barn than a church."

And well he might, because it looks from the map as though he could fit the little church into the rectory ballroom with room to spare!

Despite the rector's annoyance, a Mr Wells celebrated the Wake refurbishment by planting a chestnut tree at the crossroads in Crux Easton. He marked it with an inscribed stone. (The electricity company later cut away the crown of the tree for their power line; health and safety then felled it, and the memorial stone disappeared. It turned up later in the Well House.)

Another hundred years passed and a church surveyor in the 1990s criticised Mrs Wake's refurbishment. He said we have "a nice little Georgian church which has been spoilt by inappropriate Victorian alterations." So he was against Mrs Wake, against the Revd Caudwell, against Mr Wells, and even against the parish registers which minced no words by calling it "the present hideous structure!"

Changes to the liturgy should be resisted, says the Prayer Book, because most changes cause more trouble than they're worth. Perhaps that should be extended to include resisting the demolition of 12th century churches. Ashmansworth kept theirs. It isn't fancy, and it's more primitive; but it's comforting, it's indigenous and it's old. And best of all there's no arguing over it.

Agricola