

SOME ISLE OF WIGHT HYMNWRITERS

An essay based on a talk given to the Friend to Friend group at the Ryde Baptist Church, George Street, Ryde on Tuesday 5th February 2013

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The psalm writer of biblical times exalted:

*O praise God in his holiness: praise him in the firmament of his power
Praise him in his noble acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness
Praise him in the sound of the trumpet; praise him upon the lute and harp
Praise him in the cymbals and dances: praise him upon the strings and pipe
Praise him upon the well tuned cymbals: praise him upon the loud cymbals
Let every thing that hath breath: praise the Lord*

We may not have too many loud cymbals in churches these days but we do have breath and most these days a well tuned keyboard, we hope.



Bishop Thomas Ken 1637 -1711

Our first hymn was written under a tree in the rectory garden at Brighthelmston (now Brighton) some 345 years ago by Thomas Ken. He was born in 1637, educated at Winchester College and New College Oxford before entering the church and being ordained. In July 1667 at the age of 30 he was inducted as Rector of village of Brighthelmston or Brixton as it was then known.

Throughout his life Thomas Ken was noted for strength of conviction and fidelity to his conscience. Appointed in 1679 as chaplain to Princess Mary at The Hague, he soon incurred her husband's displeasure through his outspokenness, and promptly returned to England.

Holding a similar post at the Court of Charles II, his firm hand refused to give the use of his house to Nell Gwynne, the king's mistress, but this time resulting in a far different outcome. For it is said to have moved the lax, but good-natured Monarch, to appoint him Bishop of Bath and Wells.

But, in the following reign Thomas Ken, true once again to his colours was one of the seven bishops sent to the Tower for refusing to read the Declaration, while at the Revolution he was

deprived of his See for failure to take the oath of allegiance to the new Sovereign. If it be asked how his gentle nature could be so firm, the answer lies in Thomas Ken's sincerity and prayerfulness. When released he was finally given a home by his friend Lord Weymouth at Longleat House, where he spent the remainder of his days. He died there on 19th March 1711

Thomas Ken published "A Manual of Prayers and Hymns for use of the Scholars of Winchester College" he advised the boys:

"Be sure to sing the morning and evening Hymn in your chamber devoutly, remembering that the Psalmists upon happy experience, assure you that it is a good thing to tell of the loving-kindness of the Lord early in the morning and of His truth in the night season."

(The group sang three verses of his morning hymn)

v1

Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily stage of duty run
Shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
To pay thy morning sacrifice

v2

Redeem thy mis-spent time that's past,
Live this day as it 'twere thy last:
Improve thy talent with due care;
For the great Day thyself prepare

v7

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him, all creatures here below,
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.



Bishop Samuel Wilberforce 1805 - 1873

The second of our three bishops of Brighstone is Samuel Wilberforce. Born in 1805 into the well known anti-slavery family of William, he was privately educated graduating from Oriel College, Oxford to be ordained deacon in 1828. By 1830 his cousin, the then Bishop of Winchester, appointed him to the then remunerative living where he stayed for some 10 years. But within 18 months of coming to Brighstone he had compiled a hymn book for his parish. On the last day of February 1832 he writes in his diary:

"Finished hymns and wrote to the Bishop with them"

It appears to have been reprinted as the 3rd edition ran is said to have run to some 2,000 copies. Whether any of the hymns are his own composition is not known. He left the Isle of Wight to become rector of Alverstoke

He caught the eye of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria when he began to emerge as a public speaker gaining the nickname



'Soapy Sam' from some who were not too impressed. He rose rapidly in the church hierarchy first Canon of Winchester then Dean of Westminster and finally in 1845 Bishop of Oxford staying 24 years. He died in 1873 aged 68 after a fall from his horse.

The Bonchurch Hymn Book and the Revd John Gregory



In the middle period of the nineteenth century many of the Anglican clergy across the country were writing hymnbooks for their congregations.

The author's own interest in Isle of Wight hymn-writers started many years ago when I came across a copy of the Bonchurch Hymnbook. It was compiled by the Rev John George Gregory the Rector in 1868 for use in the new church built about twenty years earlier.

The third edition of 1873 is bound, approximately 4ins by 5ins with some and around 300 hymns of which some 50 are specifically for children. It was published by S.W. Partridge & Co of Paternoster Row, London. This edition however was written at 29 Redcliffe Gardens, SW and was for the use of the congregation worshipping at Park Chapel, Chelsea to where George Gregory had recently moved. A dozen of the hymns he marked as being his own copyright. A flavour of his writing is given by the extract quoted below:

Grace before Meat No 264

Great God, we bless Thy Care
Thou dost our food prepare:
The corn that grows,
The stream that flows,
The weather wet and fair, -
Lord, from Thee come,
O God, to whom
We offer praise and prayer.

In Jesu's name we may
Our thankfulness display,
For this our food,
And all the good
Thou givest us this day
Oh teach us how
Our hearts to bow
Before Thee, Lord, we pray.

Grace After Meat No 282

Oh what shall we poor children give
To Thee, our Lord and God of love
For blessings we have now received,
Sent in great mercy from above?

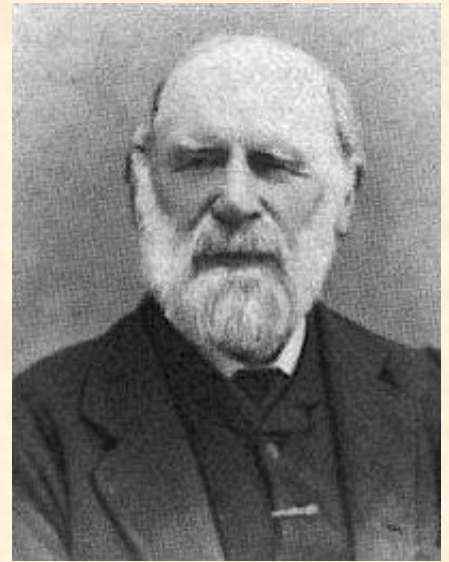
Wilt Thou accept the feeble praise
Which we, through Christ, would offer Thee?
Lord, may we thank Thee more and more
For goodness constant, full, and free.

General No 39

Every hour is passing
Brings us on our way,
Onwards, upwards, homewards,
Towards the glorious day.
Every joyful moment
In which our hearts delight,
Tells of gladness coming
In your heaven so bright.

Each of these hymns has many more verses

his hymns and hymnbooks such as *'The Bright Blue Sky Hymn Book'* were very popular in their day few now are sung or read. However we must spend a little time on the hymn that gave its name to one of his most successful collections. *'There's a Friend for little children above the bright blue sky'* soon achieved great popularity, and was constantly sung by the Sunday-school children, not only of the English-speaking races but also of many others. It was translated into many languages and tongues including the Japanese and Chinese and was in common use among all denominations.



The hymn was first included in "Hymns Ancient and Modern" when the supplement of 1868 was published. Sir John Stainer wrote the tune that is as well known as the words during an afternoon at one of the editing sessions. He called it "In Memoriam" no doubt in remembrance of his young son who had died just a few weeks earlier. The hymn is perhaps the only one that has had a jubilee service at St Paul's Cathedral in London where some 4,000 children from many denominations were present.

A tin smith and shop keeper by trade, Albert Midlane experienced near bankruptcy and the threat of the workhouse when the business of a friend with whom he had a financial bond got into trouble. Sunday schools across the world collected halfpennies and pennies from their pupils – in fact enough was donated to provide a pension allowing him to live moderately but with security until his death in Newport at the age of 84.

'There's a Friend for little children' may well be his best known hymn but the one that is sung most today especially by the Methodists *'Revive Thy work, O Lord'*

(The group at the talk sang three verses of his hymn)

Revive thy work, O Lord,
Thy mighty arm make bare;
Speak with the voice that wakes the dead,
And make Thy people hear.

Revive Thy work, O Lord,
While here to Thee we bow;
Descend, O gracious Lord descend!
O come and bless us now.

Revive Thy work, O Lord:
Give power unto Thy word;
Grant that Thy blessed Gospel may
In living faith be heard.

There is much material available covering the life and writings of Albert Midlane. Some is included in a separate essay elsewhere. His books survive as a complete set in the British Library and the web has many references to him. There are many contemporary reports in the local press. Details and these and other links are provided in the [bibliography](#) which is included in this section of the *IW History Extras* website.

Some women Island hymn writers

As we are reminded by the life of Jane Austin being an author in the 1800 hundreds was not quite the right thing for a lady but writing poetry, especially if it could be used as a hymn, was considered most acceptable.

Mary Maude 1819 - 1875

She was born Mary Hooper in Bloomsbury district of London during 1819 and died in 1913 at Overton-on-Dee aged 94. In 1841 she married to become Mary Maude and moved to the Isle of Wight to live in Newport.

A year or so later in 1847 she wrote really just for her Sunday school class at St Thomas', now the Minster, at Newport the now famous hymn *'Thine for ever God of Love'* However, it was published the next year in the front of a little book called *'Twelve Letters for Confirmation'*

But this was by no means her first literary effort, for while still in her teens she had written three textbooks – *'Scripture Manners and Customs'*, *'Scripture Topography'* and *'Scripture Natural History'* – based on the findings of Eastern travellers of the early nineteenth century. A search on the web will find them as free pdf files produced by Google Books. They are certainly well worth a look. The picture shown above is one of the illustrations from these early books.



Put yourself back into her Sunday school class of 1847 and sing the hymn written especially for you:

Thine for ever! God of love,
Hear us from thy throne above;
Thine for ever may we be
Here and in eternity.

Thine for ever! Lord of life,
Shield us through our earthly strife;
Thou the Life, the Truth, the Way,
Guide us to the realms of day.

Thine for ever! thou our Guide,
All our wants by thee supplied,
All our sins by thee forgiven,
Led by thee from earth to heaven.

Elizabeth Missing Sewell 1815 -1906

Elizabeth Sewell as born during 1815 and grew up in Newport High Street. She lived her entire life on the Island, dying in Bonchurch during 1906. She wrote two novels and much uplifting literature also one then well known hymn for seafarers *'Trough perils many safe to land – The land we longed to see'*

In 1892 the IW County Press wrote:

A plaque is unveiled to E. Missing Sewell – authoress and education pioneer – at St Boniface Diocesan School site which she opened in the 1860s for 24 girls at St Boniface Court, Mitchell Avenue, Ventnor. She wrote some 75 books and from the profit financed the school. Ventnor and District Local History Society were responsible for placing the plaque.

A member of the Oxford Movement and very high church she tried to insist that no dissenting books were used in the school.



Anne Houldich Shepherd 1809-1857

Another authoress that is little generally known today. Anne Houldich Shepherd was born at Cowes in 1809 and went on to write the hymn for which she is particularly remembered:

Around the throne of God in heaven
Thousand of children stand
Children, whose sins are all forgiven,
A holy, happy band

Singing: Glory, glory, glory !

In flowing robes of spotless white
See every son arrayed,
Dwelling in everlasting light
And joys that never fade

Singing: Glory, glory, glory !



One of the many open spaces of Cowes

There are many more verses of a similar nature

Jemima Luke 1813-1906

Jemima Luke was another lady who lived to a ripe of age, dying in her 93rd year during 1906 at Newport here on the Isle of Wight

In the book “*Newport in Bygone day*” R. J. Eldridge, mentions the hymn

“I think when I read the sweet story of Jesus”

and says that Mrs Jemima Luke spent the evening of her days in Newport. The hymn which is titled “*The Child’s Desire*” but better known by its first line was evidently written on a stagecoach when she was travelling between Taunton and Wellington first appeared in the ‘Sunday-school Teachers’ Magazine’ in 1841.

Jemima Luke is another writer many know little about. However, she did write an autobiography ‘*Early Years of My Life*’ which was published in 1900. She does not appear in ‘*The Hymn Writers of Hampshire*’ by D.M. Sale, Wilton Publications 1975 which includes many connected with the Island. Perhaps she is not included as she is not truly an IW writer, but one who retired here in later life. More references are made to her work in the bibliography which accompanies this section of the website.



Alfred Lord Tennyson 1809 - 1892



No account of would be complete without mentioning Alfred Lord Tennyson who like Jemima Luke adopted the Island as a home. He was born 6th August in 1809 at Somersby Rectory in Lincolnshire and died on the 6th October 1892.

In 1862 he was summoned to Osborne by Queen Victoria who had been moved by the dedication to the Prince Consort of the third edition of *Idylls* published that year. The correspondence between then lasted until his death. Perhaps not strictly a hymn writer, two poems which have appeared in hymn books are worth quoting in part, especially ‘*Crossing the bar*’ as it has Island connections – written after returning home from Lymington to Yarmouth.

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea,
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark;
For though from out our bourn of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face,
When I have crossed the bar.

And the well known New year verses of :

Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky
Ring out wild bells, to the wild sky,
The flying cloud, the frosty light:
The year is dying in the night;
Ring out, wild bell, and let him die.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

Cardinal John Henry Newman 1801 – 1890

Although not strictly an Isle of Wight hymn writer he must be mentioned as he regularly visited friends on the Isle of Wight especially during the years 1861 and 1865. William Ward who inherited Northwood House at Cowes was a life long friend and member of the Oxford Movement. Although he did not entirely share Newman's more liberal views he did start a mission at Totland and was visited several times whilst they both were on the Island. Another friend was Sir John Simeon of Swinston, the MP for the Island who on becoming a Roman Catholic resigned, but was re-elected nevertheless. As there was a general election in 1865 it was in Simeon's interest for prominent secular and churchmen to be seen visiting him and this partly explains Newman's trip to the Island in 1865. It is known that Alfred Lord Tennyson dined with Newman and Simeon on several occasions. Cardinal Newman had friends at Ventnor and he celebrated mass there in 1861 in a temporary chapel before St Wilfred's was built. When he returned to the Island in 1865 Newman was working on his famous writing *'The Dream of Gerontius'*. He spent some time at Ryde with the Countess of Clare using her private chapel. Other hymns that will come to mind when the Cardinal is mentioned are:



*'Firmly I believe and truly'
'Praise to the Holiest in the height'*

*'Help Lord the souls,
'Lead kindly light'*

Thomas Whytehead 1815-1843

The last of the IW hymn writers was born on the last day of November 1815 in the North Riding of Yorkshire, Thomas Whytehead was the 4th son of a local cleric. He was educated at Beverley Grammar School and St John's College, Cambridge. After ordination in 1839 his first parish as a curate was at All Saints Freshwater. As his vicar was forced to be away he was at an early age left in charge of the thirteen hamlets that then comprised the parish of Freshwater. During this time he wrote much poetry, some hymns and a wonderful accounts of his daily work amongst community.

It was not long before Thomas Whytehead was appointed Chaplain to Dr Selwyn, Bishop-elect of New Zealand, and he sailed for that country on Boxing Day 1841. When the ship was In Sydney he fell and ruptured a blood vessel. Although he went on to New Zealand he never took up duty there.



He spent his remaining time in correcting the Maori translations of the Bible, Prayer and Hymn Books. Almost his last act was to translate the hymn by Thomas and Ken "Glory to Thee, my God this night" into Maori rhyming verse.

"Two hundred and fifty copies have been printed", he wrote, "and sung in church and school by the natives, and several of them came and sung under my window ... It is a comfort to think one has introduced Bishop Ken's beautiful hymn into the Maori evening worship, and left them this legacy when I could do no more for them".

Five days later he was dead - aged just 28 years.

Finally we return back to where this short account of IW hymn writers started some 346 years. Back under a tree in Brighstone Rectory Garden and remembering Bishop Ken's command to the boys of Winchester School – "Be sure to sing the morning and evening hymn devotedly" His evening hymn, which does not have to be in Maori here today, but perhaps with our imagination taking outside the Mission House in the Bay of Islands with those singing to the dying young man, Thomas Whytehead, who had translated it for them:

(The group then sang three verses of Bishop Ken's evening hymn)

Glory to thee, my God, this night
For all the blessings of the light;
Keep me, O keep me, King of kings,
Beneath thy own almighty wings.

Forgive me, Lord for thy dear Son,
The ill that I this day have done,
That with the world, thee, and myself
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.

Praise God, from whom all blessings
flow,
Praise him, all creatures here below,
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.



Waimate Mission House, Bay of Island,
New Zealand's oldest house



The Three Bishops in Brighstone village is named after the bishops over the centuries that have been rectors of the parish. Two of them, Thomas Ken and Samuel Wiberforce, have featured in the story of Isle of Wight hymn writers above. A final thought - it just may be if the reader can write hymns as good as some of the ones referred to above then one day perhaps you might even get a third of a pub named after you!

More information on specific IW hymn writers will be found elsewhere on this website. The bibliography to this section also has many links to other sites.

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[**Bibliography and further Information**](#)

The compiler of the talk reproduced above gratefully acknowledges the information from the many sources available and hopes that the reader will use the bibliography attached to explore them further.