

Our History

The Knatchbull-Hugessens - by Graham Beck

Reginald Bridges Knatchbull-Hugessen was Rector of West Grinstead from 1889 until 1908. He came to the parish aged 58 with a fairly large family; Everard, Mabel, Violet, Winifred, Margaret, Maurice, Hugh and Tatton to name a few. Each of them has a tale to tell of their lives in West Grinstead; the daughter who married a curate and had Jolesfield school children as her



bridesmaids; the son who was interested in photography and all things mechanical—not to mention the coming of electricity!

Rev Knatchbull-Hugessen's second wife (he had been widowed by the age of 50) bore him the last of his offspring, Rachel Joyse, five years after his arrival at West Grinstead. The photo shows the family at the child's christening in 1894.

With this entourage of children (although most were adults when they came to West Grinstead) the Hugessens played a huge role in society, supporting the local schools both at Jolesfield and Dial Post—many an 'entertainment' was written, directed, acted and sung by members of the family on numerous occasions.

The building of St Michael's was one of their first projects, being completed ready for services by November 1890. Not a mean feat, but not content with that, almost simultaneously a restoration programme was instigated at St George's.

The work is detailed in the February 1891 Parish Magazine held at WSRO (ref Par/95/7/7) 'The foundations have been thoroughly examined and made good, the walls being under-pinned and repaired in many places; the roof has been stripped and recovered, many of the defective timbers renewed; the ceiling has been removed, and the old timbered roof disclosed to view, the chancel and St Mary's chapel being boarded inside; a new oak ceiling has been placed in the tower. The old southdoor of the chancel which was nearly buried, has been reopened, and a one-light and a two-light window, which had been blocked up with monuments, have been opened, the monuments being placed elsewhere. All the doors have been renewed; the old screen has been restored; a new communion table provided; the deal pews have been removed and their place supplied by low oak sittings, to match the ancient ones still remaining in the

church; an old stone staircase in the tower has been discovered and put in order, and the bells repaired and re-hung.' This was only two years into Rev Hugessen's incumbency!

By the time he retired to London in 1908 he was well respected and well liked. He died only a couple of years later in 1911 and was brought back to West Grinstead to be buried. This is an excerpt from the parish magazine at the time;

'Reginald Bridges Knatchbull-Hugessen, for many years Rector of this Parish, the restorer of the Church, the builder of St. Michael's and All Angels, Partridge Green, entered into his rest on Saturday, January 28th, 1911, at 11 a.m., and was buried in West Grinstead Church Cemetery, under the old oak tree, the spot specially chosen by him, on Thursday, February 2nd, surrounded by a great company of those who loved him, family, relatives, old parishioners and friends. At the same place and hour, his faithful servant, Thomas Slater, was also buried, having died only a few hours after his master. The Peace of dear West Grinstead Church, who could not feel it? The muffled peal so perfectly rung, the reverent mourners, the beautiful calm day. Wreaths were given by the Parish, by the mothers, and by the Jolesfield School.'



The south side of the Rectory (now Glebe House) at West Grinstead, which Hugessen had 'extended' to cater for his large family.