

Leatherhead & District Local History Society

Potted Histories No 62

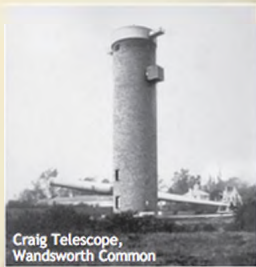
John Craig - Vicar of St. Mary's Church Fetcham (1836-1839) and Inventor of the Craig Telescope



John Craig MA

On the 31st December 1805 John Craig was born at Fescati, County Dublin, Ireland. He was educated by his Scottish father, Rev. R. Craig at his father's scholastic institution for gentlemen. Later he continued his education at Trinity College, Dublin, where he took his BA at the age of 21. He was ordained a deacon in 1829 and a Priest in 1830. In 1834 he graduated at Cambridge with an MA. His first wife, Alley, died of cancer in Hastings. Later that year he married Jane Helena Johnstone. She was the youngest daughter of the Rev. James Johnstone and had a personal fortune of £56,000 a considerable sum at that time. In December 1836 he was appointed vicar of Fetcham in Surrey. It was here that his love for things "beautiful" was to take him on a life of refurbishment and building. He had the windows altered from square ones to a more sympathetic Norman-style. His time at Fetcham was short lived, in 1839 he was appointed vicar of All Saints church in Leamington, and began his involvement with the National Schools.

In 1847 at his wealthiest, he appoints "Collectors" to canvas for funds to rebuild All Saints church, destined to be one of the biggest churches in the country even though the proposed central tower and spire were never built. He had a love of sailing his yacht was called - The Black Dwarf. Between 1850 and 1851 he began initial work on his telescope project. The lens was started. Preliminary designs were started on the "monster telescope". The Telescope was built and opened on Wandsworth Common in 1852. However, two years later 1854 criticism of his telescope's performance forced him to abandon the project. His only son, Robert, dies aged 20 as does his beloved wife - Helena. In 1856 he was imprisoned for over a month in Warwick jail for an alleged misappropriation of funds during the building of All Saints Church, Leamington. In 1859 he married his third wife, Jane Goodchild Percival on 3rd March. His telescope falls into disuse about this time and is dismantled, leaving just the tower. 1869 aged 64 he retires from All Saints as vicar and a year later Jane dies. Around 1871 the telescope tower is demolished, the land returned to the common. He died 30th June 1877, 5,000 people attended his funeral.



Craig Telescope,
Wandsworth Common

Goff Powell - With acknowledgement to various web sites

For information regarding Membership, Lectures and Museum opening hours contact:

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