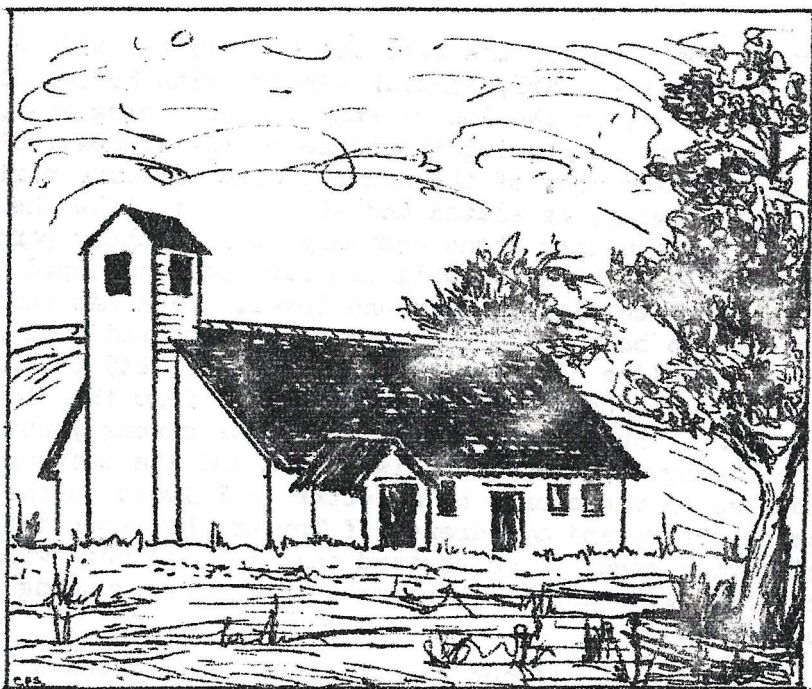


The Three Churches of Torver

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1538-1849

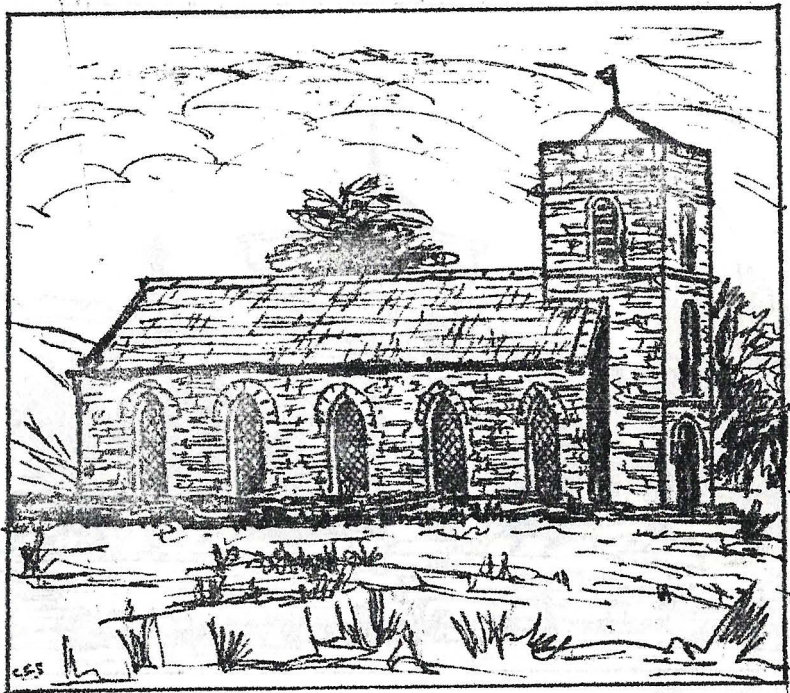
THE THREE CHURCHES OF TORVER

In Ellwood's 'Forty-five Years in a Mountain Parish' is an illustration of the Church as it had appeared before 1849. It is a small, low building, white-washed, with a slated roof of fairly steep pitch. At the west end is a bell tower, not much higher than the apex of the main roof; along the south side, moving from west to east, there is a simple slated porch, a square window, a low door, and finally, presumably lighting the chancel, two smaller square windows. The tower, also roofed with slate, is gabled on its east and west sides, the lines corresponding to the gables of the main building. Had it not been pulled down, but carefully cherished, this little church would now have been regarded as a gem of traditional Lakeland vernacular architecture.

In the same book of Ellwood's is a picture of the second church, demolished in 1884. It is still a small building, but has been designed out of a textbook. The west tower is in three stages, marked by string courses, and has crenellation round the top. In the topmost stage are lancet

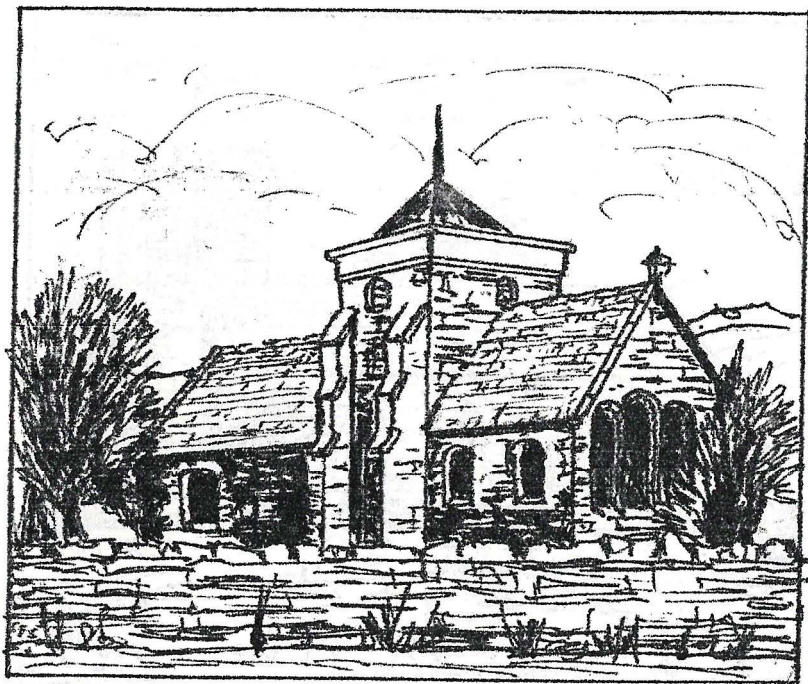
shaped openings for the bell chamber; in the middle one there is an Early English window, with hood-mould, looking west; in the lowest stage, also facing west, is the doorway, echoing the shape of the window, but broader. The body of the Church, seen from the north in the drawing, is slated and stone built, like the tower, in the dark stone commonly used in these parts. Spaced along the north wall are five lancet shaped lights, which rise from ground level. Each has what appears to be a relieving arch round its head just below the line of the roof. Inside, the 1849 church retained the (old) three-decker pulpit from the older building. Ruskin evidently felt quite strongly about the incongruity between this church and its setting, because in the course of a letter to Ellwood on the architecture and appearance of Torver, he wrote that clergymen ought to understand that the old whitewashed churches were most in keeping with the surrounding scenery.

A note by Ellwood, dating from 1907, gives a scrap of additional information about the arrangements for public worship during the earlier part of his ministry, which besides being a testimony to his zeal, is also rather unusual. He records "the gift by will of a small mountain chapel at Greenrigg, by Mrs. Airey, for use for divine service on Sundays. We had for five years uninterrupted service in this chapel on Sunday evenings." The period must have been the mid-1870's, because in 1876 a Towers Charity prayer book was delivered to 'Greenrigg Chapel'. The room used for worship was on the upper floor of the slated, stone-built barn situated on the sloping ground close to the southern corner of the main house. Possibly the room, which measures 12'9" x 16'6", was originally a bracken store. A door gives direct access from the top level by the house, and a skylight provides modest illumination. On either side of the fireplace inserted in the wall opposite the door is a shallow recess, in which shelves would have accommodated hymnals and prayer books. The internal walls are plastered and whitewashed. In 1983 the room was used by Mrs. Myers for general storage purposes.



1849-1884

The existing Church, dedicated to St. Luke in 1884 when it was discovered that there had been no dedication hitherto, was designed by Messrs. Paley and Austin of Lancaster, also out of a textbook. It was, however, soundly constructed in a style regarded at the time as appropriate and acceptable, but not one to excite either the antiquarian or the aesthete of a century later. The visitor entering the Church will note the plain sandstone font, dating probably from the fourteenth century. On the west wall are two large wooden panels on which has been painted the words of the Lord's prayer, the Apostles' creed and the Ten commandments. This nineteenth century work is a fairly late example of its type. The two lights in the west wall were installed in memory of Sarah Barratt, widow of William Barratt, in whose memory she herself had donated the window above the altar. The Barratts of Holly How, Coniston, were then the principal land-owners in Torver. There are two other commemorative windows, one on either side of the communion table, to the Rev. T. Ellwood and his faithful wife, Dorcas. All these windows are typically late



1824 - 1825

Victorian both in conception and execution.

There are few wall plaques. The oldest dates from 1729, and is fixed to the south wall of the nave. It records the gift of John Woodvill, mariner, of Whitehaven: 15L to William Wilson and his heirs to dispose of for the use of the poor of Torver, as to paying for learning and books. The small plaque in the north nave wall recalls the long ministry of Matthew Carter in the first half of the nineteenth century. Almost hidden in the passageway to the vestry is another plaque recording how in 1756 'this Church of Torver was augmented', how in 1759 'lands were purchased with 400L, whereof 200L was given by Queen Anne's Bounty, 100L by the executors of William Stratford, and 100L by other benefactors'.

In the vestry, the visitor can see the old oak parish chest, in use until the 1960's. On the lid, faint traces of geometrical decoration may still be seen. Set into the vestry walls are fragments of panelling from the old Church. The initials incorporated

in this work enable it to be dated from the early eighteenth century. T.B. could refer to Thomas Birkett, who lived at Crook and was churchwarden in 1722; and M.C. may be Matthew Coward, husbandman, of Oxenhouse, who was one of the apprizers of the will of John Park of Beckstones in 1724. Coward was never a churchwarden, however. Could it be that he and Birkett had been responsible for the carving? There is also an unusual old offertory box of oak, octagonal, eight inches across. Its handle, which terminates in an octagonal knob, is ten inches long. Various initials have been scratched on this handle: 'E.W.' and 'W.W.' 1707 --m presumably William Wilson of Greaves Ground and his wife Eleanor. It would be nice to think that they had given the box. Also inscribed are the initials of four clergymen, with dates: 'R.W.' 1734, 'R.B.' 1740, 'M.I.C.' 1807 and 'T.E.' 1861. It is a remarkable coincidence that these four who left their marks on this box each went on to an incumbency of extraordinary length, as if this initialling had been a passport to clerical longevity..

Hanging on the vestry wall is a framed drawing, prepared at the time when the present church was being built, to show the parishioners what they were going to have for their money. It is quite a good drawing, but the verdict of time must be that the exterior of the Church is too uniformly dark and heavy. The central position of the squat tower seems to add to the feeling that, somehow, the whole building has never got off the ground. We may perhaps hope that the ancient yews which had witnessed the two rebuildings in less than $\frac{1}{2}$ a century felt that they were getting value this time. They at least remain as a living link with the oldest building of which we have any record on this site.

