

LEW CHURCH

From Irene Widdicombe, March 1991.

Since there are now so few people, and soon there will be no-one, who remembers Lew Church as it was in the old days, I must put on record my memories of how it was in the early part of the century. A few years ago I visited the church for the Sunday morning service, and felt very sad. There were just seven people there - the Rector and his daughter, the organist, we three visitors and one other. What a contrast from the days of my childhood, when the church on a Sunday morning would be quite full. All of us in our Sunday best - Granny and Aunt Grace still dressed in the way of Victorian ladies, voluminous black clothes and little black bonnets a'top. What would they think of us now - even nonagenarians garbed like anyone else! So, on Sunday mornings, Granny arrived in state in her brougham, driven by Tom Lang, her gardener-coachman, and drawn by Ruby, fat old Ruby, who looked far more at home harnessed to the cart and setting forth to fetch the coal for the house, from Coryton station. In summer-time this equipage was full. Granny in her abounding hospitality kept the house full to capacity all through the summer. Those for whom there was no room in the brougham, scrambled down Ragged Lane - Ragged Lane which in far earlier times had been the main coach road into Cornwall.

How things have changed. Though not really so long ago, the snobbishness of those days is almost impossible to believe; yet, at the time, we took it all in our stride and as the normal and proper way to live!

So, the way we sat in church was very strictly adhered to. In the front seat centre sat Lew House - any overflow having to retire to the pews on the left. Row two was reserved for Mr. and Mrs. Sperling. They sat in solitary state as they had no children and I never remember seeing any visitors with them. Row three was cut in half by a pillar and the two seats beside it were for Granny. There was always competition between us as to who should have the privilege of sitting beside her, the others having to use the pews on the left.

Next in status was Mrs. Arundel and young Roger, the Curate's wife and son, and seat five was for the schoolmaster and his family, the Dawes. After this came the hoy poloy. The right-hand pews followed the same pattern. They were for the servants of the big houses. So, of course, the first two housed the Lew House lot, then the Sperling's and in the fourth, usually Florrie sat alone. Selina being in the choir took her place by the organ. Lang, when Dora and I tried to persuade him to sit in what we considered his rightful place, invariably answered - "Well, Missie, I don't reckon I be any better than anybody else in this here village, so I sits at the back to make sure!" What an old darling he was. We haven't finished yet. Those very important members of the community - the farmers - their place was sideways on to the sanctuary. When it came to Communion time, the right order was, of course, strictly maintained. I can always see Cicely dashing from-the back where she played the organ, so that she was in her correct place in the family, and all those in the seats on the left followed suit. I can't now remember where in the hierarchy the farmers came, whether before or after the schoolmaster's family.

The sermon was the the highlight of the service, especially when Uncle Sabine preached, never longer than five minutes and always very pithy. The other remarkable part of the service was the singing of the psalms. These were sung verse by verse in turn by Uncle Sabine in his lovely tenor voice and the coarse Devon voices of the choir topped by the unmusical and strident Selina. What a pity all this happened before the days of tapes or records, so the memory of it all is lost.

After the service came the parliament, as we all forgathered outside for a good "Tell" as they say in Devon. This was eventually broken up when Lang reappeared with the equipage to transport us back to Ardoch and the huge Sunday lunch. How we ate in those days!