

## A HOME IN AMBROSE PLACE

In the early 1800's, Worthing was said to be a "semi-fashionable" community with under 4,000 inhabitants, a stylish esplanade, bathing machines, two libraries and a theatre. So, finding herself in reduced circumstances following the death of her husband, this is where Mrs. Elizabeth Crawford and her three daughters Eleanor, Martha and Matilda Louise moved to in 1821, renting number 13 Ambrose Place for the sum of £55 per year. Originally known as Mount Pleasant, Ambrose Place was built westwards from St. Pauls the Chapel of Ease between 1814 and 1826 and named after the man who built it - Ambrose Cartwright. It has been said that Mr. Cartwright intended to build a matching terrace on the south side of Ambrose Place but ran out of funds, hence each house was given the land opposite as a garden and this remains so to this day.



The book "Ambrosiana" - Letters and Belongings of Certain Ladies of Ambrose Place, Worthing (published 1936 by Lee & Nightingale) gives a wonderful insight into life at that time. On moving to Worthing Matilda was just 16: "she found delight in open-air exercise, scampering on horseback over the Downs without respect for any barriers infringing common rights". As Matilda grew up, entertaining was often. Refreshments were light; music abundant. Doctors' fees and chemists' bills were frequent forms of expense; so too were the drives afield before the coming of the railway (a chaise to Brighton and back, with turnpike toll and postboy cost a guinea).



Ambrose Place after the building of Christ Church, seen in the distance

Martha wrote in a letter dated 1830 "Such great alterations continue to be made in this town by the addition of new buildings that if we remain here many years longer we shall be almost in the centre of the town; you may remember at your first visit to us turning your poney to graze in a field behind our house - in that field now stand two gentlemen's houses with stables and walled gardens and a third is soon to be erected; and sixteen or twenty houses are now building to the west of us in what we used to call the Heene fields".



By 1835, Elizabeth had received a legacy from her late brother-in-law and when 14 Ambrose Place became vacant she was in a position to purchase the freehold and move next door. Elizabeth contributed to the building of Christ Church but died in 1841 before it was completed and was laid to rest in Broadwater Church.

The "girls" remained spinsters: Eleanor died in 1867 aged 77, Martha ten months later aged 69 and Matilda Louise died in 1886 aged 81. They are buried together in the grounds of Christ Church close to the street where they spent many happy years.

Over 50 years ago I used to walk along Ambrose Place with my grandmother, never dreaming that one day I would be fortunate enough to live in one of these elegant houses. Now our home is number 13 and the history of the house can be felt in the very walls. There is an aura of peace, femininity maybe, that family and friends also comment on when they visit. The old stone steps up to the front door are worn with the footsteps of the past. Sitting in a conservation area and listed, Ambrose Place will still be here in another 200 years - a jewel in the crown of Worthing - and as residents we are but guardians for a short while. In 1905 number 13 was also called "Moulmein" (now Mawlamyine, the fourth largest city in Myanmar). I have yet to discover who gave the house that unusual name and why. Through the decades many families have lived at number 13; many characters have been part of the history of Ambrose Place. The Crawford ladies will always be remembered and I am sure Elizabeth and her three daughters would be delighted to know that the current occupants of number 13 love the house and the street as much as they did.