

## The Children's Hymnal

In March 1863, two years after the first phase of construction of the original church was completed in 1861, the avenue of lime trees leading to the North Porch and the two yew trees were planted in the northeast and northwest corners of the churchyard by James Knight of Vernon House, Farnham, to celebrate the wedding of the Prince and Princess of Wales - as recorded on two plaques at the base of the yew trees. Twenty-five years later, in 1889 Mary Ann(e) Sidebotham (1833-1913), the sister of the Rev<sup>d</sup> Thomas Sidebotham the first vicar of The Bourne, donated the funds for the construction of the lychgate at the entrance to the churchyard from Vicarage Hill (then known as St Thomas' Hill).



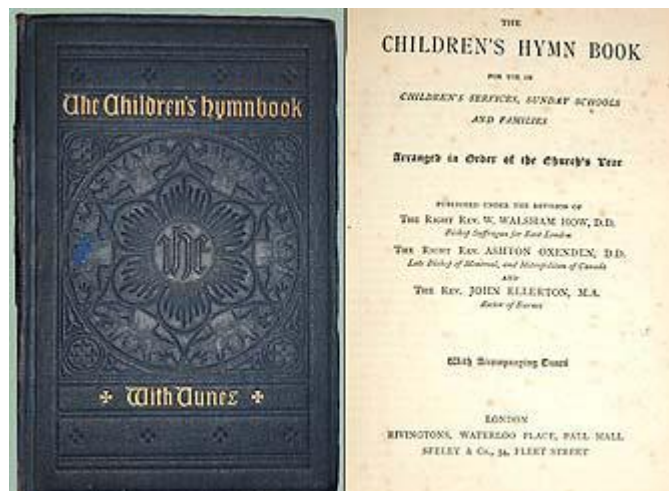
The construction of the lychgate was funded by proceeds from the hymn book. This romantic pen and ink drawing of it covered with ferns as it was before it was renovated, was drawn by Mrs Helen Sale who we thank for giving us permission to reproduce it.

So how was the sister of a Victorian vicar able to raise that sort of money? Miss 'Annie', as she was affectionately known throughout the parish, was an accomplished musician and she played the harmonium (and later the organ) at Sunday morning services at the new



Mary Ann Sidebotham known as Auntie Annie

church. However, she found it a struggle to cope with the singing of the congregation that was enthusiastic but somewhat limited in its musicality. The donation came from the proceeds of sales of the very popular and successful Children's Hymn book, which she co-edited with Frances Carey Brock. This hymn book was first published in 1881, and by 1898 over one million copies had been sold and it stayed in print until 1911; so even by today's standards it was a best seller. Mary Ann was not only the Musical Editor, but also composed several of the hymn tunes, which she only permitted to be attributed under her initials MAS. Amongst the other composers who specially contributed tunes for the hymnal were Sir Arthur Sullivan, Sir John Stainer, and some family members.



The cover and title page of the copy of the Children's Hymn Book in the choir vestry of St Thomas's. It is interesting that the title page makes no mention of either Frances Brock or Mary Ann Sidebotham, but pays tribute to three senior clerics.

Her co-editor Frances Brock (1827-1905) was the wife of the Dean of Guernsey (The Dean is often attributed as being the editor!). Mary Ann had met Frances when her brother, at his doctor's suggestion, went to Guernsey, to convalesce from an illness that was threatening his eye-sight, before he was appointed to The Bourne. Frances Brock had for some time wanted to produce a hymnal expressly for children that would give them "an experience of singing in childhood such hymns as they would love and value all their lives". The production of the Children's Hymn book was undertaken against a background of considerable social change, which included the setting up of children's charities and the passing of legislation on education, child employment and welfare, and this is reflected in many of the words of the hymns.

The whole story of the hymnal is recounted in an excellent booklet by John Barnett and it is also mentioned in the history of the choir at <http://www.stthomaschoir.co.uk/history.asp>