

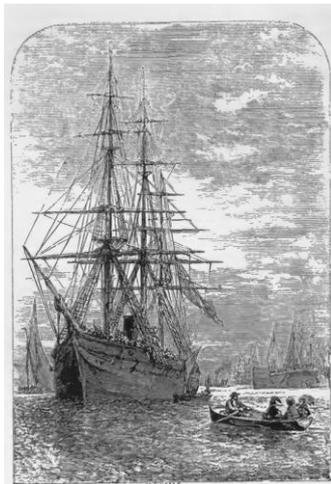
Miss Catherine Marsh

Frederick Courtenay Skene Chalmers was the Rector of St George's Church, Beckenham from 1851 until 1873. Living with him and his wife, Matilda, in the 18 room Georgian Rectory (pictured below) were his father-in-law the Rev. Dr William Marsh and his daughter, the author and evangelical lay preacher



Catherine Marsh (pictured right).

During her life, Catherine became a national figure for her exertions on behalf of the poor-and needy. Among them were some of the navvies who built the Crystal Palace and the railways into Beckenham between 1852 and 1857.



In her book of 1860, "English Hearts and English Hands" she wrote :
"Early in the year 1853, a large number of Railway excavators, amounting at length to nearly thousand, were gathered from different parts of the kingdom, to work in the grounds of the Crystal Palace Nearly two hundred lodged in the village of Beckenham"

The book chronicles the life of the navvies; their arrival in Beckenham, the rebuilding of the Crystal Palace, originally designed by Joseph Paxton for the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park, and then their recruitment into the Army Works Corps to build roads for the troops in the Crimean War.

Catherine records seeing them off on their ship from Greenhithe (pictured below left); and renewing her friendships with some of the men and their families in later years.

In a preface to her book, Frederick Clements wrote that

"the sun's rays may be seen gleaming from the crystal roof of that vast temple to the arts of peace, which has displaced the oaks and elms of the green woodland whose were the hands that reared that colossal building? Its massive iron pillars, its huge girders, the ponderous supports of its complicated roofing, all tell us that it was the work of the hardest and strongest of Britain's sons."

Catherine preached to these men in a barn in the Croydon Road, opposite what is now Cedars Road.

She interceded in disputes on their behalf and single handed broke up a riot at the Penge entrance to the Palace.

Most famous were the tea parties for the navvies that took place in the garden of the Rectory (pictured right).

