

CHAPTER 21

Marriage

An earlier irritant for many Nonconformists was that they could not be married in a Service at their own church, even though both parties to the marriage (or even both entire families) had been faithful worshippers there throughout their lives. The Wedding Service would only be valid and the union legal if held at the Parish Church.

The law was changed as part of the process to eliminate discrimination against non-Anglicans, and thenceforth a marriage could be solemnised in another church if the Registrar was present to hear the binding Declarations and Vows.

This new dispensation was seized upon by Rev. J.S. Butcher, who showed his concern by ensuring that as soon as the new building was opened for worship, it was registered for solemnising marriages on 15th July 1895. The new building was described in the certificate as 'Congregational Church' in place of the former 'Chishall Independent Meeting', both of them being 'situate at Little Chishall'. It was still necessary for the Registrar to be present at weddings.

It is told that an accident befell Mr. Butcher during conduct of a Wedding Service, in that his eye-glass came apart and he was unable to read the Service wording. This might have prevented the ceremony being completed, but fortunately for him the bridegroom was a jeweller and during a pause in the proceedings, he was able to repair the eye-glass on the spot.

The need for a Registrar to be present did on one occasion could serious embarrassment for two church members (Michael Burling and Wendy Harradine) who were to be wed in 1965. Michael Burling gives this account:

'Both bride and bridegroom got to the church on time but still they were kept waiting. The trouble was that the Registrar was not aware that LITTLE Chishill Congregational Church was in the middle of GREAT Chishill.

'The bridegroom stood waiting for half an hour inside the building whilst the bride sat in the wedding car outside, and the organist (Mrs. Jessie Pegram) played and played and played.

'The Registrar (Charles Rider) went to Little Chishill. He asked numerous villagers where to find the church, but none of them knew. Finally he pulled to a halt at an isolated farmhouse. After a mention of the couple's names, it turned out that the farmer knew them and where they were to be married.

'The couple were still waiting when Mr. Rider found the church at Great Chishill forty minutes later than expected. The minister (Rev. David Buckle) had telephoned the police after half an hour, but everything ended happily.

""It was sheer luck that I eventually found the church", Mr. Rider said afterwards. The minister's wife Joan explained "Although the church is in Great Chishill, it is in Little Chishill parish".

This incident made the members determined to be independent in these matters, and in April 1965 an iron safe was purchased for £2.10s. so that official records could be safely kept on the premises and the building could be licensed for holding Marriage Services without need for a Registrar to be present.

These facilities have never created a great demand for marriages in the chapel, and soon after Rev. R. W. Rooke became minister, he conducted the first wedding for 13 years.