

CHAPTER 22

Barley Chapel

There are several clues to the first stirrings of Nonconformity in Barley. Rev. Nathaniel Ball was Rector of Barley until his sequestration in 1660, and he was ejected from the living at Royston in 1662 for refusing to conform to the harsh laws of church government then enacted. He moved to Little Chishill and continued to preach in surrounding villages.

In 1663 an intriguing report states 'There lyes a Widow Hawkes at Barley in Hertfordshire who hath meetings of 300 at a time'. She could hardly have used her home for this purpose, and presumably the meetings took place in a barn, the largest of the buildings in a village. In 1704 a place of worship was registered by a John Norris.

The opening history of Barley Chapel was inauspicious. The building was erected largely through the efforts of a local farmer, John Burgess, and builder, William Savill, and shopkeeper, George Allbon, who had registered a temporary building for worship in 1829.

Registration as a Baptist Chapel by these persons appears rather strange, for Mr. Savill was a church-warden and he had married a Congregationalist.

The church was built in 1841, as a superscription above the front door testifies. An application for registration dated 12th February 1842 confirms that a building in Barley was then in their possession and occupation and used as an Independent Chapel.

The land had been part of the Manor of Hinchbury, and was purchased from the tenant William Warren for £76. A Deed of Enfranchisement was given by Lord Dacre on 30th July 1845 on payment of £25 by these

founders of the Chapel. The building was placed in the hands of trustees on 4th February 1846.

Records of two payments totalling £70 to a Mr. Wilkerson for bricks strongly suggest that these came from nearby brick fields, and were doubtless the red bricks used for the side walls.

Finance was obviously in short supply, for the building was the subject of a mortgage on 3rd December 1845 for £280 granted by Mr. J. Pearce, a draper from Newbury then living in Barley. This was not redeemed until 11th February 1860 by final payment of £202.10s.

Rev. A. MacArthur, coming from Tasmania, was minister from March 1842 until 1845, and in 1846, Thomas Flutter was invited to become minister. The records end abruptly in 1848.

The pond in Homestall Meadow was used for baptism by total immersion, but this was not without difficulties, as for example when local pranksters had put thorn bushes on the bottom of the pond. The congregation waned, however, and the Baptist Chapel was later closed after 1848 for lack of support.

The congregation was later re-constituted, for the Chapel was registered for solemnisation of marriages on 9th January 1855.

By 1882 the church was listed as 'out-station', and in 1889, a committee of local Congregationalists was formed to take over the building. Rev. R. T. Thomas of Great Chishill assumed this charge as an extension to his ministry, and in 1893 the two churches were officially grouped. Ever after, Great Chishill and Barley remained a joint pastorate.

Land was acquired for a burial ground on 26th October 1926 at a cost of £5.