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Baptist Manse May Have Been Early Church

1641 building at Higher Cloughfold.

Sion Baptist Chapel trustees have purchased the former Polefield Cottage, adjoining Springhill, Higher Cloughfold, for use as a manse – and research has revealed every possibility that the building – which bears the datestone 1641 was an early meeting place of the Baptist cause in the district, an intriguing coincidence.

Already the newly-appointed minister at Sion, the Rev F. J. Baldwin, together with his wife and two young sons, has moved into the house, the oldest in the district. He commences his pastorate on Sunday, Oct 7th, and was formerly at Luton.

The trustees have acquired the house from the executors of the late Mr and Mrs John Hart. The name has been changed to “The Baptist Manse”.

WAS WALLED UP

After the purchase was made it was noticed that the date of its erection is given as 1641. The door bearing this date was for many years walled up and was only reopened when the late Mr Hart purchased this and the adjoining property on the Spring Hill Estate, and converted the house for his own use.

For nearly 30 years, the datestone was covered by a growth of ivy. The inscription reads “I R T 1641”.

This date, together with an old deed dated Oct 14th 1659, which has recently come into the church’s possession, throws considerable light on the history of Sion Baptist Church, and also on Higher Cloughfold in the 17th century. For this reason these ‘notes’ may be of general interest.

They have been compiled for the “Free Press” by Mr James S. Hardman , of Higher Cloughfold.

The earliest authentic date in connection with the church is Oct 28th 1672 when a licence was granted for a meeting place for “the barne of John Piccops in Dedwencloough, Lancash. Indept.”

BACK TO CHARLES THE SECOND

This licence is found in the State Papers of the reign of Charles II for that year. It was granted under the First Declaration of indulgence following 10 years of persecution of Protestant Dissenters (1662) and succeeding Acts.

The place name “Dedwencloough” (sometimes given as “Dedwoodclough”) was originally the depression with a running stream on the east side of the church

graveyard. This stream was the rain water collected on the hillside behind the church and school and was at one time open to the place near the present Cloughfold station, where it joined the River Irwell.

The main road opposite the church was then much lower and there was a ford over the stream where it crossed the road.

The latter was known in old deeds as the "Accrington to Todmorden Turnpike Road". Now the water runs through a stone culvert for most of the distance. There was a similar ford at Tup Bridge, Rawtenstall. Later the name "Dedwenclough" covered a much wider area. An old ordnance map shows that it included Staghills, part of Newchurch and even Fallbarn in Rawtenstall.

DEMOLISHED

The "Barne of John Piccoops" was almost certainly the barn attached to the old farm house which was demolished some years ago to provide for widening the road at the turn of the road in Higher Cloughfold. This building was erected by the Rector of Newchurch, William Horrocks, in the year 1619. It was the rectory until the present rectory was built in 1851.

The late Dr W. T. Whitley, F.R.H.S., in his "Baptists in the North West" states on the authority of a document in his possession that in the year 1770 a certain James Townend gave his house for use as a meeting place for "Protestant Dissenters" which had (sic) to be called "The New Chapel".

It has been a mystery where this "New Chapel" was situated, but now it is suggested that it was this "Baptist Manse".

The initials over the date - I.R.T.- may very well stand for those of this James Townend. At that period the letters "I" and "J" were used interchangeably, especially in inscriptions of this nature. The "R" may have been the initial of a second Christian name. These were rarely used at that time, even in legal documents.

E.g. in Newbigging's "History of the Forest of Rossendale", a list of the "Greaves" of the Forest is given, covering a period of over 250 years, and in no single instance is a second name given. Alternatively the "R" may have stood for the initial of his wife's Christian name. This was a frequent custom.

WAS OPEN ROOM

Another reason for identifying "The New Chapel" with "The Baptist Manse" is that the upper floor, converted by the late Mr Hart into three bedrooms and a bathroom, was originally one open room. This would form an excellent 'Meeting Place'.

However "The New Chapel" evidently became too small for the number of worshippers, for on Feb 11th 1705, a Robert Litchford made a Deed of Gift of his house, which stood on the site of the present church "for the use of all Protestant

Dissenters called Anabaptists or Independents, within the Forest of Rossendale and the places adjacent thereto, as shall from time to time assemble there for religious worship, when the same shall be made fit and commodious as a chapel or meeting house”.

It is interesting to note that in the Deed surrendering this house, Litchford states that he had purchased it from “James Townend”. This building was the meeting place of the church for over 130 years.

The old deed of 1659 mentioned above, deals with the surrender of land called “The Chapel Croft” and certain dwelling houses in “Dedwoodclough”. These houses and certain gardens are described as being called “The Foulds”. The present “Baptist Manse” was apparently one of these.

The name “Chapel Croft” is interesting. The deed states that this land had been “lately in the hands of and in the occupation of William Horrocks, the Incumbent of Newchurch Church from 1622 to 1641” and the surrender was made “at the special request and demand of Marie Horrocks, daughter of the said William Horrocks”.

That the name “Chapel Croft” was that given to the land upon which the present Sion Baptist Church stands is proved by several deeds in possession of the Church. In connection with two purchases of land for additions to the graveyard the term is used, and as late as 1891, when land on which the Sunday school is built was purchased, it is described as “Chapel Croft, part of Great Meadow”. It would appear that this land was at one time Newchurch Church property. In the 17th and 18th centuries the Church is often styled “The Chapel in Newchurch”.

The later history of “The Manse” until the beginning of the 19th century is not very clear.

The lands and property referred to appear to have passed into the family of a John Ashworth, of Cloughfold, who was a descendant of an old Whitewell Bottom family of the name of Ormerod. In the year 1855 two daughters of John Ashworth were living at the house now known as Spring Hill Farm.

INHERITED ESTATE

One of these, Miss Mary Ashworth, in that year married Captain Charles Patrick of Rochdale. Mrs Patrick, on the death of her sister, inherited all her father’s estate. This included the whole of the Spring Hill estate, including Spring Hill House, which was enlarged at the time of her marriage, and became their residence until their deaths. Mrs Patrick died in 1883 and Captain Patrick in 1895.

The property then passed into the hands of two nieces of Mrs Patrick – Mrs R.C. Turner and Mrs M.A. Royds. Later the Spring Hill property was purchased by the late Mr John Hart, and it is now in the hands of various owners.

To return to the “Baptist Manse”.

There is an old tradition that at one period it was used as a tavern.

Of this there is no real proof. But one feature of the internal arrangement of the house would appear to support this tradition.

OTHER RESIDENCES

A further word may be added in regard to the residences of former ministers of Sion Church. There is a record that the first minister, William Mitchell, lived for a time at a house in "Wolfenden". On Oct 13th 1692, there was registered at the Manchester Sessions "the house of William Mitchel at Wolfenden in the forest of Rossendale". The site cannot be identified as "Wolfenden" covers a considerable area to the east of "Dedwencloough" and covered both Booth and Edgeside.

This registration raises an interesting question. Had this house become the meeting place of the church after the one licensed in 1672, and was it so used until James Townend gave his house for a "New Chapel" as mentioned previously? Or was it an additional meeting place for the inhabitants of Wolfenden? Probably the latter as there is only this isolated mention of this house.

With regard to the following minister, Richard Ashworth, who was the pastor for 45 years (the longest pastorate in the Church's history), we are on surer ground. He was a man of considerable means and owned land and a house at Tunstead, where he lived during the first part of his ministry. Later he bought Carr Farm and Rawtenstall and lived in what is now called Carr House.

BURIED IN GARDEN

Baptisms took place in an open air baptistery in the garden, and at his death in 1751, Ashworth, at his own request, was buried there. During the last 12 years of his life he suffered from blindness.

In the year 1773 the Church built a "Manse" for the use of its minister – a Mr Clayton. It was built at "the east end of the chapel" and at the cost of £30, being part of a legacy of £150 left by Robert Litchford in 1710. A few years ago a piece of dressed masonry was found at the bottom of a grave which was being opened in the churchyard. This was probably part of this house. It would be demolished when a new church was built in 1838.

Rev W.C.H Anson, minister from 1860 to 1865, resided at Cawl Terrace at the shop at the corner of Union Street West and Bacup Road.

There, in addition to his pastoral duties, he was in business as a "chemist and druggist".

This business was taken over by Mr Henry Schofield after Mr Anson's departure from Rossendale.

His successor, the Rev James Patterson, is said to have resided at the present Spring Hill Farm House. The Rev A.J. Parry during his ministry (1871-1878)

resided at Hareholme House, where he wrote his "History of the Cloughfold Baptist Church".

The next two pastors, the Revs W.L Giles and James Smith, both lived at Plantation House, Dobbin Lane, this house having been taken on lease from Captain Charles Patrick.

Later, about the end of the First World War, the Church purchased "The Cross", Higher Cloughfold, as a manse for the pastor at that time, the Rev J Barton Turner, A.T.S. This property was sold after Mr Turner's departure from the district in 1929, in order to meet the cost of urgent renovations in the church.