**RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS IN DADLINGTON by TIM PARRY**

DADLINGTON MEETING HOUSE.

John Dagley was one of the most extraordinary of a breed of evangelising Gospel preachers who established non-conformist congregations and built chapels for them in the early years of the nineteenth century.

As his biographer John Sibree commented, "About the year 1790, God graciously interposed to arrest the progress of sin in this benighted district. This He did by an instrumentality as unlikely as it was unexpected; and manifested the sovereignty and power of His grace by calling to Himself John Dagley, a ringleader in iniquity, and setting him apart to speak unto the people 'the words of this life'.

During his long career, (he preached his first sermon in 1797 and died in 1840) Dagley was responsible for the building of four Independant chapels in the district; at Baddesley (1801), Dadlington (c.1801 - 2), Hartshill (1807) and Ansley (1807), as well as the composition of two long autobiographical poems written in doggerel. These he entitled "The Life of John Dagley"; including his conversion and call to the ministry", and "Grace abounding in the life of John Dagley". (1822)

He was clearly a preacher of great magnetism and a man of robust moral conviction."The interest awakened by his ministry, and the blessing which attended it, were manifested by the number which pressed to hear, the decided change which took place in many, and the almost unbounded influence which Mr Dagley obtained over the people. So great was this that his very presence inspired them with cure, and several times when some of the baser sort were stripped for conflict, his coming would cause them to slink away, ashamed of their doings. Others declared that they could do no wrong lest he should hear of it. He has been styled the Nehemiah of Hartshill".

Our interest in him derives from the fact that he lived at Dadlington for several years from about 1801.In the second of his autobiographical poems he describes how this came about:-

"A friend I had at Daddlington,

I do believe he's a good man,

His house I often us'd to reach,

And there as often, I did preach...

My mind like his, was just the same,

In what I purpose now to name,

That, if a meeting house they had,

All the neighbourhood would be glad,

My friend, he seemed to have no fear,

He said, 'he would, the meeting rear',

If I'd come there, for to reside,

And unto Baddesley I might ride....."

A plot of ground in the village was bought from his friend Mr Cook, and a house built upon it. Here he lived by farming and preaching on Sundays in the "meeting house";

"My friend he built the meeting then,

It soon was filled with living men".

But things did not turn out as planned, for Mr Cook seemed to enjoy preaching himself rather too much:

"The meeting house he'd not resign,

The pulpit, I, could not call mine,

To preach himself, he was dispos'd,

This was the mind he ne'er disclosed...."

Dagley was unwilling to share his pulpit, and he soon made up his mind to return to Baddesley, where a new chapel was being built. His house was sold back to Mr Cook, and he returned to his 'garden spot'.

"While all my friends at Daddlington,

They grieved much and made a moan."

Meanwhile he travelled twenty two miles every Sunday, reaching at Baddesley in the morning, Market Bosworth in the afternoon, and Dadlington in the evening.

The chapel that was erected for him at Dadlington still stands, a small brick box attached to Hall Farm and now used as a barn. It survived as an Independent (later Congregational) chapel until at least 1894, with a congregation of twenty recorded in a survey of 1929. The chapel never became a church in its own right, and was classed as an 'out-station' of Hinckley (1860 - 75) Market Bosworth (1875 - 77 and 1880 - 94) and Burbage (1877 - 79) respectively.

The 1884 edition of Wright's Directory contains the following:-

"INDEPENDANT CHAPEL - Service at 6 on Sunday evening,

Chapel keeper, Thomas Hextall."

There is little now to betray the building's former purpose, although inside is a hat rack, and distinct marks on the floor indicate where the pews once stood.

John Dagley too, is nearly forgotten, although his large chapel at Hartshill (now Chapel End) survives and flourishes, and in the graveyard there can be found amongst the brambles a simple tomb-stone bearing his name.

THE PARISH CHURCH OF

ST. JAMES THE GREATER, DADLINGTON.

INTRODUCTION.

For around 950 years a small rural community has been worshipping God in this building. Architecturally, it has suffered badly; for most of its history from neglect and then in the period 1887 to 1890, from a drastic and insensitive 'restoration'. What was once described as "from an historical point of view one of the most interesting edifices in the county", and "as curious and enticing an archaeological study as any," in Leicestershire, became within a few years, a church "so mutilated that little of the original fabric remains", and therefore "uninteresting". However, this judgement was given at a time when nothing post-dating the Reformation was valued, and today it has to be substantially revised.

There is a record of a church at Dadlington before the Norman Conquest, but the earliest parts of the present structure are probably of late twelfth or early thirteenth century.

DEDICATION.

St. James the Greater was one of the apostles and the first of the twelve to be martyred for his faith. With Peter and John, he was chosen by Our Lord to be a witness of His Transfiguration and his agony in the garden, and with these two he had a certain precedence over the others.

He was put to death by King Herod Agrippa I, to please the Jewish opponents of Christianity, and a legend relates that his accuser suddenly repented, declared himself a Christian, and was beheaded with him. He is often represented in art as a pilgrim with a cockle shell.

The Feast Day of St. James, Apostle and Martyr is celebrated on July 25th. Thus Dadlington's Patronal Festival falls within a few days of those of Stoke Golding (St. Margaret The Virgin) and Hinckley (The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary). Dadlington and Stoke were both part of the ancient parish of Hinckley until 1865. St. James also links Dadlington to Sutton Cheney, two miles to the north-east, whose church shares the dedication to him.

The church stands on a little hill at the north-western corner of the spacious village green, with the Dog and Hedgehog Inn close by. Beyond the churchyard to the east, is the site of the old parsonage house, which had fallen into disuse by the seventeenth century, and is now long vanished. This land, occupied by Rose Cottage and a modern bungalow, is part of the chantry land purchased to provide an income for a priest to say masses for those slain at Bosworth Field in 1485. To the south of the church the parish room, built by the Reverend Henry Lomax in 1885 has recently been enlarged and converted into a community centre.

CHURCHYARD.

The wrought iron gates and lamp at the entrance are part of the village's memorial to five local men who were lost in the Great War. The churchyard is crowded with other memorials, the earliest of which is situated on your right as you approach the south porch, close to the south chapel wall. Like many of the early headstones it commemorates a member of the Ballard family (in this case Mary, daughter of Henry) and like all the early ones it is of local Swithland slate, with finely cut lettering. It bears the date 18th January 1708/9, an interesting example of the use of dual calendars, which ended in 1752 when the Gregorian Calendar was made law in Britain.

The westernmost of the two small windows in the south chancel wall (on your left a you face the church) dates from 1890 , but its pair is in fact fourteenth century. Notice that the hood stops possess these, and amongst them are a hooded soldier and a wimpled woman.

The east end of the building has two windows, that in the south chapel is fourteenth century in date. The sanctuary east window is in fact largely the work of Ewan Christian, the architect to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who thoroughly repaired and restored the chancel a a cost of nearly ×500 in the years 1887 to 1888. He turned the existing square-headed window into the present pointed one, with its reticulated or fish-net tracery. However, he saved the mediaeval hood-stops and above the window worked in a portion of 'Dogtooth' carving of the thirteenth century, which must have been brought from elsewhere in the building.

The pair of large windows on the north side of the church were considered "a great improvement" in 1870 when they were introduced through the generosity of Henry Russell Hurst, the Lord of the Manor of Dadlington. They were supposed to be "after the Norman style of architecture", but anyone who has seen a genuine Norman window will realise that the designer of these windows had never done so.

From the churchyard looking north can be seen Ambion Hill, the site of the famous Battle of Bosworth Field, which took place in 1485. From many accounts a large number of the dead were carried to Dadlington and buried in the churchyard; in 1886, for example, the Leicester Chronicle reported that "skeletons and broken fragments of rusty armour still frequently obstruct the peasant's plough, and the old churchyard has known many ghastly re-interments of the poor soldiers remains."

Also on the north side (within a railed enclosure) is the tombstone of the Reverend Bourne, a remarkable and faithful priest, who laboured in the parishes of Stoke

Golding and Dadlington for thirty-seven years, for the first twenty two as curate and then from 1865 as the first vicar of Stoke. In that year he was described by his parishioners as "a faithful pastor, who has endeared himself to us all by his uniformly consistent conduct and piety... a faithful labourer in the Vineyard of the Lord."

BELL-TURRET AND BELLS.

The bell-turret at the west end of the church dates from the restoration of the Reverend Henry Lomax in 1890, and was immediately criticised as a "fourth-rate, fancy-tiles villa turret type of thing". More recently Nikolaus Pevsner considered it 'pretty'. Unfortunately it replaced a "quaint old oak shingle belfry or bell-cote", thought to be unique in Leicestershire.

There has probably always been at least one bell at the church, for as early as 1209 the vicar a Hinckley was awarded one mark in rent "which the parishioners of the chappel of Daddelinton pay yearly for having a bell three days a week in the said chappel." The turret now houses two small bells, one inscribed "E. Arnold Fecit 1793", a product of the bell foundry of Edward Arnold in Hangman's Lane, (now Newark Street), Leicester and the other simply "A.O.", which may refer to a member of the family of Odam, which was prominent in the village in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

SOUTH PORCH.

The present pretty Gothic porch of wood and stone was built in 1896 (see the plaque inside) and replaced a plainer wooden structure. The ancient oak door, which was also probably replaced at this time, has now completely disappeared, although in 1900 it was noticed, "much weather worn" and "preserved in the vestry at the west end."

INTERIOR.

Entering the building by the south porch, one is aware of the lightness and simplicity of the interior. A recent visitor thought the church " a friendly place, a little bit the worse for wear, but obviously used , even if infrequently". There is nothing to particularly excite the architect or antiquarian, but enough remains to provide clues as to the many features and furnishings which have long since been discarded or simply destroyed during the course of re-building.

Even the rustic mediaeval timbered roof is only a partial reconstruction of its former self. Its predecessor was obviously of great beauty and antiquity and before the outside walls were stuccoed (1890) it was visible in the form of half-timbering at the gables of the east end and in a range of timbered windows beneath the eaves of the south chapel (see the engraving of the church before restoration). A writer in 1843 was so impressed by the old roof that he recommended it as a model for church architects.

"Churches with iron roofs, and an attic on this principle, would, thrown from the hand of the artist, be susceptible of exquisite beauty of general character, and,

above all things, in detail..... Would that the substructures of our ancient churches had always been so worthily and reverentially canopied as this is - where the ravages of time and desolation of years had claimed, as this no doubt did, protection."

The writer of the above considered that this roof had replaced an even earlier and decayed one, and was probably of the fourteenth or fifteenth century.

Opposite the south door there was once another entrance, by 1782 "filled up with modern brickwork". This would have been used before the reformation for processional purposes, but became redundant when the plainer and largely non-sacramental worship of the Prayer Book was introduced into churches.

The present font is nineteenth century, replacing a very old circular font noticed by the historian John Nichols when he visited Dadlington in 1782.

The pews in the nave and south chancel, the pulpit, lectern and low chancel screen date from the restoration of 1890. They replaced high sided box pews, and a two-decker pulpit for the minister, which incorporated a reading desk and a desk from which the Parish clerk would have shouted the responses at Morning Prayer. The new pews were built by Thomas Shilton of Stoke Golding, in part using old oak from the reconstructed roof, and in part, new red deal. They were described by the Leicester Journal of that year as "the prettiest stalls we have ever met with inside a country church". They are of fine workmanship, and have been enhanced by the removal of rotten wood block flooring a few years ago.

On the lectern is a Victorian Bible, but until recently the church possessed "a large folio bible in black letter, imprinted by Robert Barker 1613, in a very good preservation from which the lessons are constantly read."

CHANCEL.

There is no proper architectural distinction between the nave and chancel, which is unusual, even in a small church. The chancel (choir and sanctuary) was completely restored in 1887 - 1888 by the architect Ewan Christian. He raised the floor by several inches to give it more importance, laid it with encaustic tiles, and included furnishings such as the Litany-stool and choir stalls. In the sanctuary a fixed altar with crucifix and candlesticks replaced a plain wooden table, and altar rails were placed at the entrance to the sanctuary (the personal gift of the Reverend Henry Lomax in 1888). A dark green reredos was fixed behind the altar, into which was inserted a very pretty little cross, cut from a large slab of alabaster discovered in 1887. This "conspicuous and beautiful alto-relievo", which replaced the Lord's Prayer and Creed (painted on the east wall by the churchwarden) has in turn been discarded.

All these changes were designed to make the church more suited to sacramental worship, and they had the effect of moving the focal point of the building from the pulpit to the altar. Whereas in the eighteenth century Holy Communion was only celebrated three or four times a year, by 1900 its frequency was once a month,

and it is now of course celebrated every Sunday and additionally on certain feast-days.

Among the properties of the sanctuary is a very beautiful silver cup. About six inches high, the bowl is decorated with a band of foliage, and underneath the foot is engraved the date 1573 and the initials R.P. These also appear on cups belonging to the churches at nearby Sutton Cheney (1575), and Swepstone (1577), and are therefore probably those of the maker. The cup is now on bank deposit. There are also some pewter plates and a fine large seventeenth century pewter flagon, and a silver paten and silver plated flagon of 1880 were given by the Reverend Henry Lomax.

The three pointed openings in the south wall of the chancel date from the thirteenth century. The easternmost and smallest is a piscina; a water drain used to receive the water in which the priest washed his hands as well as that with which the chalice was rinsed at the celebration of mass. The drain is now blocked and used as a credence table. The two larger recesses were termed sedilia, and were seats used by the priest and deacon during certain parts of the mass.

SOUTH CHAPEL.

Dividing the south chapel from the church is a thirteenth century arcade of very low arches on short octagonal piers. On the south side of one pier the head of a bearded man is carved into the masonry. This may be mediaeval, although it has clearly been re-worked at some time.The chapel is not now used as such (the seats all face north), but the tiny pointed piscina in the south wall shows that mass was once celebrated here. Also near the east end is the church chest, which was the traditional home of the church plate and registers. This may be the "very old town chest, without date", which John Nichols remarked on in 1782.

The stained glass window in the south chapel was inserted in 1904 and is probably the work of a well known firm of Victorian church furnishers, Shrigley and Hunt. It was purchased out of a bequest of ×100 left by John Chun of Orchard Farm. No mediaeval glass survives in the building, despite the fact that the arms of the Cotton family were found by Nichols "barely discernable on an old pane of painted glass", and that some fragments of stained glass were recorded as late as 1877.

FAMILIES AND MONUMENTS.

In 1622 Dadlington was visited by William Burton (of Lindley Hall near Higham), the first historian of the county. He found it emblazoned with the coats of arms of Grey and Hastings, two great landowning families who had owned the manor of Dadlington. He also found the arms of Burton, for William was likewise Lord of the Manor here.

The Cotton family (mentioned above) was very important in the village in the seventeenth and eearly eighteenth centuries. Thomas Bernard Cotton (1703 - 1732) gave some plate to the church, and in 1782 there remained "an old monument of the Cottons, but not one letter legible". No doubt this was one of the "ruinous monuments" which survived in 1886 but have all disappeared since.

GLOSSARY.

BOX PEW- Type of pew common until the early nineteenth century with high sides and lockable doors.

CREDENCE TABLE- Small side table, shelf or niche for Eucharistic elements before consecration.

ENCAUSTIC TILES- Tiles inlaid with differently coloured clays burnt in.

HOOD STOPS- Architectural carved feature at either end of stone moulding round windows.

LITANY- Series of petitions and responses used in church services.

REREDOS- Ornamental screen covering the wall at the back of the altar.

STUCCO- Plaster or cement used for coating wall surfaces.

TRACERY- Stone ornamental openwork especially in the heads of Gothis windows.