

VCH Leicestershire

Online Texts-in-progress

**Blaby:** Post-Reformation Religious History

August 2012

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VICTORIA  
COUNTY  
HISTORY



Leicestershire

### *Introduction*

The ancient parish of Blaby contained the townships of Blaby and Countesthorpe. The mother church was at Blaby, and Countesthorpe was a dependent chapelry until 1878, when it became a separate ecclesiastical parish and perpetual curacy in its own right.<sup>1</sup>



*Figure 1: All Saints' Church, Blaby*

<sup>1</sup> *London Gazette* (31 May 1878), 3361-3.

## Advowson and Income to 1878 by James Smalley and Emma Roberts

### *Advowson*

Immediately after the Reformation the advowson was held by the Bishop of Lincoln, but it appears to have come into lay hands in the late sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> By the seventeenth century there appears to have been some dispute over the right of presentation, as rector George Rogers, inducted in 1604, claimed in 1646 to have spent most of his 42 years as rector defending his incumbency against someone called Stirton.<sup>3</sup> In a record of 1605, the name of the patron has been amended at some point from Sir George Belgrave to the king.<sup>4</sup> From 1662 the advowson was in the hands of the crown,<sup>5</sup> and was administered by the Lord Chancellor from 1863.<sup>6</sup> In 1874 the advowson was transferred to the Bishop of Peterborough by exchange for benefices outside the diocese.<sup>7</sup>

### *Income*

Blaby appears always to have been a wealthy living, and its valuation of £20 in 1290 was the fourth highest in the deanery.<sup>8</sup> The residual net value of the rectory in 1535 was £15 4s. 11d.<sup>9</sup> In 1831, the net annual revenue of the previous three years was £350.<sup>10</sup> From this income the curate at Countesthorpe was paid a stipend, recorded as £3 6s. 8d. in 1526,<sup>11</sup> and also in 1614.<sup>12</sup>

In 1776, the open fields of Blaby were enclosed; the rector received 35 acres and 9 perches for his glebe land and a further 204 acres and 15 perches for the great and small tithes.<sup>13</sup> Countesthorpe was also enclosed that year, and the rector of Blaby received 14 acres 2 roods 7 perches for the glebe lying in that township together with 219 acres 3 roods 14 perches in lieu of all tithes.<sup>14</sup> The total was reduced by sales within Blaby township in 1799 in order to redeem the land tax.<sup>15</sup> By 1863, 18 acres of the glebe land in Countesthorpe were let as garden allotments for poor inhabitants at 1s. 2d. per 100 yards.<sup>16</sup> The glebe land is recorded as remaining stable at around 200 acres in each of the townships from 1846 until 1876,<sup>17</sup> when the living became vacant.<sup>18</sup> The bishop,

<sup>2</sup> J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1810), IV, 53.

<sup>3</sup> A.G. Matthews, *Walker Revised, being a Revision of John Walker's Sufferings of the Clergy during the Grand Rebellion, 1642-60* (Oxford, 1948), 244; see also Protestant Nonconformity, below.

<sup>4</sup> W.G.D. Fletcher, 'Documents relating to Leicestershire preserved in the Episcopal registers at Lincoln', *Assoc. Archit. and Archaeol. Soc. Rpt.*, 22 (1893), 139.

<sup>5</sup> Nichols, *History*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> W. White, *Hist., Gaz. & Dir. of Leics. & Rut.* (Sheffield, 1863), 728.

<sup>7</sup> *Benefices* (Parl. Papers 1875 (199), lvii), p. 661; *The London Gazette*, 10 Jul. 1874, 3437-8.

<sup>8</sup> *Tax. Eccl.*, 63.

<sup>9</sup> *Valor Eccl. IV*, 185

<sup>10</sup> *Ecclesiastical Benefices* (Parl. Papers 1837 (439), xli), 49

<sup>11</sup> H. Salter (ed.), *A Subsidy Collected in the Diocese of Lincoln in 1526* (Oxford, 1909), 102.

<sup>12</sup> A.P. Moore, 'Leicestershire Livings in the Reign of James I', *Assoc. Archit. and Archaeol. Soc. Rpt.*, 29 (1907-8), 162.

<sup>13</sup> ROLLR, EN/A/38/1.

<sup>14</sup> ROLLR, EN/AX/83/1, 18-20.

<sup>15</sup> Lincs. Arch., DIOC/TER BUNDLE/LEICS/BLABY (1821)

<sup>16</sup> White, *Hist., Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1863), 780

<sup>17</sup> White, *Hist., Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1846), 377, 379; *Kelly's Dir. of Leics.* (1876), 335. The figures are round, and later evidence suggests the actual acreage was higher.

<sup>18</sup> *Leic. Chron.* (22 Jul. 1876), 10.

as patron, saw an opportunity to augment the livings of two urban parishes under his patronage, St Nicholas, Leicester and the new parish of St Matthew, Leicester. Reverend Arthur White was inducted to the rectory of Blaby, and with his agreement a scheme was put forward and approved by the Queen in Council to provide £60 per annum to the incumbent of St Nicholas and £90 per annum to the incumbent of St Matthew, from the income accruing to the rector of Blaby.<sup>19</sup> Responding anonymously in the local press, 'A Conservative Churchman' pointed out that both Blaby and Countesthorpe were populous townships and 'unmanageable by one Incumbent', and therefore it would be more appropriate to divide the parish to create two independent livings.<sup>20</sup> This was finally achieved on 16 May 1878, when the Queen in Council approved the creation of a separate parish of Countesthorpe, endowed by glebe land of 112 acres 30 perches taken from the Blaby glebe and intended to produce an income of £162 2s. 2d., together with a perpetual annuity of £37 16s. 8d. per annum for Countesthorpe's vicar, paid by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. This transfer of land left Blaby with a net annual income of £518,<sup>21</sup> suggesting Blaby retained around 359 acres.<sup>22</sup>

## Blaby

### Income and advowson from 1878 by James Smalley

Blaby had 355 acres of glebe in 1887.<sup>23</sup> This was reduced by the sale of 37 acres in 1892 to a single purchaser for £4,406 10s.,<sup>24</sup> with the proceeds invested in Leicester Corporation Stock.<sup>25</sup> The remaining land was sold in 1911 for £3,055,<sup>26</sup> and the proceeds invested in India 3½% stock.<sup>27</sup> Total income in 1916 had reduced to £320,<sup>28</sup> but recovered by 1928 to £800.<sup>29</sup> Following the creation of Leicester Diocese, the advowson now rests with the Bishop of Leicester.<sup>30</sup>

### Parsonage by James Smalley and Emma Roberts

In 1821 Blaby parsonage was simply described as 'brick and slated', with a brewhouse, chaisehouse, barn, stable and walled croft of about half an acre.<sup>31</sup> It was largely rebuilt by Reverend Hoskins in 1845 at a cost of £2,000, financed partly by a loan of £1,200 from the Governors of Queen

<sup>19</sup> *London Gazette* (28 Jul. 1876), 4237-8.

<sup>20</sup> *Leic. Chron.* (12 Aug. 1876), 9. See also Church of England Records Centre (hereafter CERC), 53867 for other protests.

<sup>21</sup> *London Gazette* (31 May 1878), 3361-3.

<sup>22</sup> Based on the yield from the acreage in Countesthorpe.

<sup>23</sup> *Glebe lands* (Parl. Papers 1887 (307), lxiv), 124-125

<sup>24</sup> *Glebe lands (sales)* (Parl. Papers 1892 (96), lix), 1

<sup>25</sup> *Kelly's Dir.* (1908), 41

<sup>26</sup> ROLLR, DE 3352/89/1.

<sup>27</sup> ROLLR, DE 3352/89/6; *Report from Ecclesiastical Commissioners* (Parl. Papers 1914 [Cd. 7301] xxv), 85.

<sup>28</sup> *Kelly's Dir.* (1916), 41

<sup>29</sup> *Kelly's Dir.* (1928), 44-45

<sup>30</sup> *Leicester Diocesan Directory, 1999* (Leicester, 1999), 79.

<sup>31</sup> Lincs. Arch., DIOC/TER BUNDLE/LEICS/BLABY (1821)

Anne's Bounty, repayable over 10 years.<sup>32</sup> The gardens were described as extensive and 'tastefully laid out'.<sup>33</sup> A description of this house in 1933 reveals that it had four reception rooms, seven bedrooms, a dressing room, a kitchen and offices. The coach house remained and another stable had been added. The rector complained that the house was too large to maintain and required too many servants.<sup>34</sup> The house was sold in 1965 for £1,873 1s. 1d.,<sup>35</sup> and a new house was provided. That house was also sold in 1995, and the rector lodged in Narborough until a new house was built in 1997.<sup>36</sup>

## The Anglican Church by Emma Roberts and Pam Fisher

### Religious Life

Rector John Legh, inducted in 1545, is reputed to have remained in office throughout the reigns of both Edward VI and Mary I.<sup>37</sup> George Rogers, rector from 1604 to 1646, was a Royalist, and was charged by the county committee in 1646 on counts including being active for the Commission of Array and preventing parishioners from attending a parliamentary summons to resist the king's forces.<sup>38</sup> Rogers appointed his son-in-law John Jones as curate, perhaps to care for Countesthorpe, and Jones was similarly articulated against.<sup>39</sup> Rogers was replaced in 1646 by Thomas Bosse, whose appointment was confirmed by the Crown in 1660. During his incumbency, Bosse was involved in a dispute regarding infant baptism (see Protestant Nonconformity below).<sup>40</sup> At the primary visitation of Bishop Sanderson in 1662 it was reported that he had abandoned his living,<sup>41</sup> and it was declared vacant that year.<sup>42</sup>

In 1603 the church was reported to have 300 communicants,<sup>43</sup> and 281 in 1676.<sup>44</sup> By 1721 the number of parishioners of communicable age was only 150, and of them only 30 usually took communion on the four occasions each year when it was offered, although there had been 50 communicants at Easter that year. There were two services each Sunday and further services on Wednesdays and Fridays weekly.<sup>45</sup> In the religious census of 1851, Reverend Hoskyns recorded a

<sup>32</sup> ROLLR, 1D 69/4/1.

<sup>33</sup> White, *Hist., Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1863), 728

<sup>34</sup> CERC, N.B. 19/26 (1933)

<sup>35</sup> CERC, N.B. 19/26 (1965)

<sup>36</sup> D. Cook: interview by Emma Roberts, 30 July 2012.

<sup>37</sup> J.R.H. Prophet, *Blaby Church and Village in History*, (Leicester, 1965) 2

<sup>38</sup> Matthews, *Walker Revised*, 244; see also Protestant Nonconformity, below.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>40</sup> A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised being a revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Other Ejected and Silenced, 1660-2*, (Oxford, 1934), 65

<sup>41</sup> A.P. Moore, 'The primary visitation of Robert Sanderson, Bishop of Lincoln in 1662, of the Archdeaconry of Leicester', part II, *The Antiquary*, Oct. 1909, 390.

<sup>42</sup> Matthews, *Calamy*, 65.

<sup>43</sup> A. Dyer & D.M. Palliser (eds), *The Diocesan Population Returns for 1563 and 1603* (Oxford, 2005), 380.

<sup>44</sup> A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition*, (London, 1986), 336.

<sup>45</sup> Lincolnshire Archives, Gibson 12, 547-50.

combined attendance of 174 for both the morning and evening services. He remarked that there were 260 seats available within the church, including 130 seats for children.<sup>46</sup>

With a high level of nonconformity in the parish, the church rate was causing friction by the 1860s. In 1863, a Mr Glover was summoned before a bench of magistrates which included Blaby's rector, Reverend Hoskyns, for refusing to pay the church rate. He was given seven days to pay, but still refusing, bailiffs were sent to his door and took away furniture said to be worth over £8 for a debt of 2s. 9d.<sup>47</sup> Others then also refused to pay, on principle. Mock auctions were held in the village and a meeting was convened at the Baptist Church, at which Mr. Kearley of the Liberation Society 'gave a clear and admirable exposition of the arguments on which Dissenters base their objection to pay the impolitic and obnoxious impost'.<sup>48</sup> A case was taken to the ecclesiastical courts, but was resolved when the dissenters agreed to pay a *voluntary* contribution equivalent to the amount of the rate.<sup>49</sup>

By 1872 communion was being held eight times a year, with around 30-40 communicants each time. Afternoon services were very well attended, although attendance in the morning was 'rather scanty'.<sup>50</sup> By 1881 monthly communion services had been introduced; the number of communicants was similar. The average size of the congregation was said to be around 200, and increasing, with the free seats very crowded; the rector suggested that this was possibly deterring some from attending.<sup>51</sup> By 1910, with new seating in place, the average number in the congregation was 300, and was still increasing. Monthly communicants had increased to 78, with 140 taking communion at Easter.<sup>52</sup>

## Building

The earliest part of the present building is the chancel, which dates from around 1300, although the windows are from the restoration of 1858.<sup>53</sup> It contains a 14th-century stepped sedilia and piscina, which were once 'bricked up and plastered over', and were discovered during the restoration of 1902.<sup>54</sup> There is a single aisle, south of the nave, which is also early 14th century,<sup>55</sup> with single and double-width recesses in place of a window at the east end and an adjacent piscina, indicating a medieval side-altar or chantry, perhaps dedicated to two saints. Under the flooring beneath these niches, the restorers in 1846 discovered 'a stone of about 5 or 6 feet in length ... having a small cross upon it, and much worn, as if by the knees of votaries'.<sup>56</sup> The font is medieval and fairly plain in appearance, as is another presumed font, which was discovered in the grounds of Blaby Hall in the 1950s and now stands in the churchyard, to the north of the church.<sup>57</sup> The clerestory is 16<sup>th</sup> century, with square-headed windows. The tower is perpendicular and surmounted

<sup>46</sup> TNA: PRO HO 129/411/18.

<sup>47</sup> *Leic. Chron.* (1 Aug. 1863), 5.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* (15 Aug. 1863), 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* (17 June 1865), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Northamptonshire RO, ML 594.

<sup>51</sup> Northamptonshire RO, ML 601.

<sup>52</sup> Northamptonshire RO, Box X926.

<sup>53</sup> N. Pevsner (rev. E. Williamson), *Leicestershire and Rutland* (Harmondsworth, 1984), 104.

<sup>54</sup> *Assoc. Archit. and Archaeol. Soc. Rpt*, 26 (1901-2), xcii.

<sup>55</sup> Pevsner, *Leicestershire*, 104.

<sup>56</sup> *Leic. Jnl.* (11 December 1846), 3.

<sup>57</sup> D. Cook: interview by Emma Roberts, 30 July 2012.

by a spire, with a door from the spire to the tower roof on the west and a single tier of lucarnes, with four tiers of 'small decorated heads – a motif unique in the county'.<sup>58</sup>

The aisle roof bears the date 1630 and is inscribed 'WHID Rob Biggs', but the church was not otherwise in a good state of repair at that time. A report of 1633 reveals unglazed windows in the chancel and clerestory and broken glass in the tower, suggesting either neglect or iconoclasm. Part of the aisle was unpaved, and the Bible and Book of Common Prayer were in poor condition. The report also commented that 'The north side of the church wants plastering in the outside of the walls next the Church yard',<sup>59</sup> which suggests that the exterior of the rubble walls on the other sides of the church might at one time have been hidden with a stucco-type finish. In 1779, further repairs were required, with a visitation drawing attention to the need for new doors, the pews to be repaired or replaced and a new Book of Common Prayer to be bought; these defects had been remedied by the following Easter.<sup>60</sup>

Although in 1838 the archdeacon reported rain coming through the roof and that new seats were still required,<sup>61</sup> by 1842 all the fabric was reported to be in good order, other than the open seats, 'many of them rotten', and a pulpit and reading desk which 'want painting in an oak colour'.<sup>62</sup> Nichols describes the pulpit in 1810 as being blue.<sup>63</sup> A general restoration in 1846 therefore mainly comprised 'cleansing, roofing, flooring and repewing'.<sup>64</sup> Rows of benches for children were added to the chancel and a total of 151 new seats created, of which 115 were free.<sup>65</sup> Grants were received from the Church Building Society of the County and Town of Leicester (£50),<sup>66</sup> and the Incorporated Church Building Society of London (£60).<sup>67</sup> The remainder of the £576 cost was raised by subscription, headed by a donation of £150 and a guarantee for the whole expenses by the new rector, Reverend H.J. Hoskyns.<sup>68</sup> One writer questioned prior to this restoration whether 'there was any Church in the County in such an unseemly condition as this, speaking more particularly of its interior arrangements'?<sup>69</sup> It was not simply the poor seating, fashions had changed, and Thomas Exon's western gallery of c. 1740,<sup>70</sup> described as 'handsome' by Nichols in 1810,<sup>71</sup> was termed 'hideous' by Sir Stephen Glynne in 1843,<sup>72</sup> although it was left untouched and can still be seen today.

In 1857 there were repairs to the spire, and in 1858 the chancel was restored, refenestrated and reroofed, and a stone porch added, at a total cost of £241,<sup>73</sup> which was raised by subscription.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Pevsner, *Leicestershire*, 104

<sup>59</sup> ROLLR, 1D 41/18/7, f. 10.

<sup>60</sup> ROLLR, ID 41/21, f. 51.

<sup>61</sup> ROLLR, 1850'245/50/5 f. 82.

<sup>62</sup> ROLLR, 1850'245/50/8, f. 48.

<sup>63</sup> Nichols, *History*, 53.

<sup>64</sup> *The Morning Post* (15 December 1846), 5.

<sup>65</sup> G.K. Brandwood, 'Church Building and Restoration in Leicestershire' (Univ. of Leicester, PhD thesis, 1984), 55, 478.

<sup>66</sup> *Leic. Chron.* (27 June 1846), 6

<sup>67</sup> Brandwood, 'Church', 478

<sup>68</sup> *Leic. Jnl*, 11 Dec, 1846, 3.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Pevsner, *Leicestershire*, 104

<sup>71</sup> Nichols, *History*, 53.

<sup>72</sup> G.K. Brandwood, *Bringing them to their Knees: Church Building and Restoration in Leicestershire and Rutland 1800-1914* (Leicester, 2002), 77-78.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

A decorative scheme described in 1878 presumably dates from this time: on the wall behind the altar was an 'altar decoration with IHS in the centre', and the lower part of the wall at the east end was 'covered by blue tapestry ornamented with yellow *fleurs-de-lis*'.<sup>75</sup> In 1868 the church installed an organ, with the funds again being raised by subscription,<sup>76</sup> which was installed in the west gallery.<sup>77</sup> The clock was donated by Reverend Richard Palmer and installed in 1874.<sup>78</sup> Following the discovery of dry rot in the pews, an interior restoration took place in 1902, under the guidance of Leicester architects Goddard and Co. The floor was renewed and new seating, pulpit, reading desk and choir stalls were provided. The gallery was found to be sound, and was left. The old stoves were replaced by 'low-pressure steam heating apparatus'. The total cost was £850, and £600 had been raised before the work was complete.<sup>79</sup> In 1910 the organ was moved to the chancel, where it was rebuilt in a new organ chamber, and a vestry was added at the same time, for a total cost of £450.<sup>80</sup>

The three bells dated 1611, 1634 and 1807 were augmented firstly to five in 1887 to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee,<sup>81</sup> and then to six in 1985 by the addition of a new tenor from a bequest by Reg Drinkwater.<sup>82</sup> He also bequeathed money for a silver flagon and to improve the access paths to the church.<sup>83</sup>

There is now a fine plaster royal arms, Victorian or later, over the south door. The east window was funded by public subscription in memory of those killed in the First World War. The 'Dorcas window' at the west end of the north wall was provided through the enthusiastic fund-raising efforts of a young evacuee and the daughter of the family where she was staying. This provided the impetus to others, and most of the remaining windows contain attractive modern glass designed by Veronica Whall, which were added in the early 1950s.<sup>84</sup> Sadly, some of the inscriptions are now missing, the result of damage from attempted robberies. The lead has also been stolen from the roof and, at the request of the insurers, has now been replaced by steel. Latterly, the front and back pews have been removed for wheelchair accessibility.

## Protestant Nonconformity by Emma Roberts

### *Early dissent*

Rector George Roberts was a Royalist who was charged by the county committee on a number of counts in 1646, including that he presented his parishioners to the courts for hearing

<sup>74</sup> White, *Hist., Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1863), 727.

<sup>75</sup> *Leic. Chron.* (29 June 1878), p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> White, *Hist., Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1877), 163

<sup>77</sup> *Leic. Chron.* (29 June 1878), 6.

<sup>78</sup> White, (Sheffield, 1877), 163.

<sup>79</sup> *Assoc. Archit. and Archaeol. Soc. Rpt*, 26 (1901-2), xcii.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 (1909-10), cxiv.

<sup>81</sup> T. North, *The Church Bells of Leicestershire* (Leicester, 1876), 146; *Assoc. Archit. and Archaeol. Soc. Rpt*, 19 (1887), liv.

<sup>82</sup> R. Holdridge, *All Saints' Church, Blaby: A Short Guide* (Blaby, 2011), 9-10.

<sup>83</sup> D. Cook: interview by Emma Roberts, 30 July 2012.

<sup>84</sup> Holdridge, *All Saints'*, 6-8.

sermons elsewhere.<sup>85</sup> That suggests that there may have been dissenters in the parish in the 1640s. Roberts was replaced by Thomas Bosse, and a note within the parish register, which is blank for the period between 1640 and 1662, draws attention to a dispute between Bosse and some parishioners regarding infant baptism.<sup>86</sup> Bosse was removed from the rectory in 1662.<sup>87</sup> By 1669, around 40 Baptists (referred to as 'Anabaptists') were meeting at the residence of John Fox,<sup>88</sup> a house which was registered in 1672 under the short-lived Declaration of Indulgence to hold both Presbyterian and Congregational meetings.<sup>89</sup>

Visitation returns of 1718 and 1721 both state that there were no licensed meeting houses within Blaby.<sup>90</sup> The only nonconformists recorded in Blaby in each case were six Presbyterians,<sup>91</sup> an increase from the four nonconformists listed in the Compton Census of 1676.<sup>92</sup> Further licences for meeting houses were granted in Blaby for Baptists in 1761, in George Freer's house<sup>93</sup> and for a group listed only as Protestant Dissenters in 1799, who met in 'a Building used as a Schoolroom'.<sup>94</sup>

### *Baptist*

As stated, some people in Blaby were opposed to infant baptism from the seventeenth century. However, the origins of Blaby's Baptist Church began in 1797, when 'serious persons' agreed to meet.<sup>95</sup> On 17 October 1807, Joseph Simpkin gave an indentured loan of a room for the Baptists to use, and later gave land and money for a church to be built.<sup>96</sup> Despite this gift, the family was treated like any other, for on 5 July 1820, John Simpkin and his wife were excluded from the church for pre-nuptial fornication.<sup>97</sup> The dates of the gift and the first chapel are unknown, but in 1813 collections began to raise funds for its enlargement.<sup>98</sup> A document possibly written in 183 states that the need for larger premises is urgent, but claims that the poor members of the congregation were unable to raise the substantial funds needed.<sup>99</sup> With most of the congregation being 'very poor stockingers', in 1840 the Leicestershire Baptist Association secured a pastor for them and guaranteed him an income of £60 each year for five years.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Matthews, *Walker Revised*, 244.

<sup>86</sup> ROLLR, DE 3352/1. It is unclear when this information was added to the register. One of the protagonists was Robert Everard, a prominent local Baptist who converted to Catholicism. A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised being a revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Other Ejected and Silenced, 1660-2*, (Oxford, 1934) p.65; G. Southcombe, 'Everard, Robert (fl.1647-1664)' (2004), *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com>, [accessed 16 August 2012].

<sup>87</sup> Matthews, *Calamy*, p. 65.

<sup>88</sup> R.H. Evans, 'Nonconformists in Leicestershire in 1669', *Trans. Leics. Arch. and Hist. Soc.*, 25, (1949) 133.

<sup>89</sup> *Cal. SP Dom, May-Sept. 1672*, 678.

<sup>90</sup> Lincs. Arch., Gibson 4, 392; Gibson 12, 548.

<sup>91</sup> Lincs. Arch., Gibson 4, 392.

<sup>92</sup> A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition*, (London, 1986), 336.

<sup>93</sup> ROLLR, QS 44/2/45; QS 44/1/2.

<sup>94</sup> ROLLR, QS 44/2/126; QS 44/1/2.

<sup>95</sup> ROLLR, Misc 777.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> ROLLR, N/B/38/1.

<sup>98</sup> ROLLR, N/B/38/1.

<sup>99</sup> ROLLR, Misc 777.

<sup>100</sup> G.T. Rimmington, 'Baptist membership in rural Leicestershire, 1881-194', *The Baptist Quarterly*, 37 (1998), 393-4.



The Baptists also had their own burial ground in what is now Chapel Street.<sup>101</sup> By 1829, they were said to number 240,<sup>102</sup> but in 1839, the attendance at the church was reduced due to the unpopularity of Mr Evans' preaching.<sup>103</sup> In 1851, 106 worshippers attended the morning service in the Baptist church on 30 March, 140 in the afternoon and 107 in the evening.<sup>104</sup>

Construction of a new Chapel began in 1875 at a cost of £2,100, and it was opened in 1876.<sup>105</sup> Samuel Turner, a patron of the church, was the first person to be baptised there, in 1879.<sup>106</sup> In 1900 the church purchased four cottages with the rents being collected to supplement church funds.<sup>107</sup> However, membership began to fall in this period, from 225 in 1902 to 217 in 1911.<sup>108</sup>



Figure 2: Baptist Church, Blaby.

### *Congregational*

Although not recorded in the 1851 religious census, a Congregational chapel was said to have stood on Sycamore Street from 1851. In 1926, the congregation moved to Park Road, their current location.<sup>109</sup> The previous site was then donated by Mrs Walker to the British Legion, and became the British Legion Hall.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>101</sup> '19th-century Blaby', <http://blabyparish.leicestershireparishcouncils.org/18thand19thcentury.html> (accessed 1 Sept. 2012)

<sup>102</sup> ROLLR, QS 95/2/1/5.

<sup>103</sup> ROLLR, N/B/38/1.

<sup>104</sup> TNA: PRO, HO 129/411/21.

<sup>105</sup> *Leic. Chron.* (27 May 1876), 5.

<sup>106</sup> S. Smith, *Reminiscences and Pictures of Old Blaby*, (2000), 60.

<sup>107</sup> ROLLR, N/B/38/1.

<sup>108</sup> Rimmington, 'Baptist membership', 394.

<sup>109</sup> *Blaby Parish Council* (2012), <http://blabyparish.leicestershireparishcouncils.org/> [accessed 15 August 2012].

<sup>110</sup> Member of the Royal British Legion Club, Interview by the author, Leicester, UK, 12 July 2012.



Figure 3: Congregational Churches in Blaby, present (left) and former (right)

### *Jehovah's Witnesses*

The first Bible Student in what is now the Blaby Congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses is believed to be Arthur Rest of Whetstone, who had previously been an organist at a local chapel. By the early 1920s he was an ardent Bible Student, the original name for the Jehovah's Witnesses, and his shoe repair business was boycotted for a time as a result of his religious conversion. In July 1924, he returned to his former chapel to hear a lecture by an MP who was a prominent Baptist, entitled 'The Teachings of Pastor Russell investigated in the Light of Scripture', which attacked the Bible Students' beliefs. Following this lecture, the Baptists declined to allow him to respond. As a result, the Bible Students found a local barn as an alternative venue. A meeting with a talk by Frank Freer of Leicester was attended by about 140 people, and the company of Bible Students in Blaby began to expand rapidly. They were soon meeting above a bakery in Park Road, before moving to West Street in 1925, the location which the Jehovah's Witnesses still use today. The land was purchased in June 1925, and a steel and wooden clad Kingdom Hall was erected which still survives today, although now encased in brick. By 1931, the company of Bible Students had begun to be known as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Blaby, along with Leicester Spinney Hill, form the oldest established congregations in the county, and through the work of preaching, the congregation of Blaby significantly influenced the development of other congregations in Leicestershire, including Lutterworth and Wigston. In 1987 the Blaby congregation split, and the Eyres Monsell congregation was formed as a result of this division.<sup>111</sup>

### *Methodist*

The first reference to a Methodist presence in Blaby is in 1829, when a return of meeting houses noted that 150 'Methodists' met in a chapel and 50 'Ranters' (presumably Primitive Methodists) met in a house.<sup>112</sup> In 1851 there were still two Methodist groups in the village, although

<sup>111</sup> N. Hagley, Interview by author, Leicester, 14 August 2012.

<sup>112</sup> ROLLR, QS 95/2/1/5.

both described themselves as Wesleyans, and the Primitive Methodist meeting no longer appears to have existed.<sup>113</sup> The ‘Wesleyan Chapel’ recorded in the religious census of 1851 was built in 1820,<sup>114</sup> so these may be the ‘Methodists’ mentioned in 1829. It had room for 45 people, and 30 people were at the best attended service that day. The ‘Wesleyan Branch’ opened their chapel one week before the census.<sup>115</sup> Attendance was much higher, with 50 in the afternoon and 125 in the evening, but this could have been an opening celebratory service. This may be the Wesleyan Methodist group who had purchased land for a Chapel in Blaby in 1828,<sup>116</sup> and had drawn up plans for the building in the same year.<sup>117</sup> In 1855 consent was given for a Wesleyan Chapel to be sold, but the records do not clarify which chapel this was.<sup>118</sup> It appears that a £50 charge had been ‘called in’, and this may have forced the group to sell their chapel. It is possible that this ‘charge’ was in connection with a loan for the 1851 building.<sup>119</sup> A letter asks for a proportion of any surplus from the sale to be deposited in the church fund.<sup>120</sup> There are no records to show whether the two Wesleyan groups merged at that point, or began to meet in the same premises. A visitation return of 1872 confirms that the Wesleyans were still worshipping in Blaby,<sup>121</sup> but they are not mentioned in a similar return of 1881, suggesting the congregation had then dispersed.<sup>122</sup>

A Methodist presence did not return to Blaby until the 1960s, when a leaflet asking for donations to help to build a Methodist chapel were distributed.<sup>123</sup> The Blaby Methodists’ first meeting was held in the Methodist church in neighbouring Countesthorpe in 1962,<sup>124</sup> and plans for a church in Blaby were drawn up in 1964.<sup>125</sup> The church was completed in 1965.<sup>126</sup> In 2012 the Blaby Methodist community celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the church.<sup>127</sup>

## Non-Christian faiths.

According to the 2001 census, non-Christian faiths account for less than five per cent of the Blaby population. As yet in 2012, there are no non-Christian places of worship within the village.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>113</sup> TNA: PRO, HO 129/411/22; HO 129/411/23.

<sup>114</sup> TNA: PRO, HO 129/411/22

<sup>115</sup> TNA: PRO, HO 129/411/23

<sup>116</sup> ROLLR, DE 3747/18/1, 1828.

<sup>117</sup> ROLLR, DE 3747/18/2, 1828.

<sup>118</sup> ROLLR, DE 3747/21, Conference of Birmingham consent, 21 June, 1855.

<sup>119</sup> ROLLR, DE 3747/20, 7 July 1855.

<sup>120</sup> ROLLR, DE 3747/19.

<sup>121</sup> Northamptonshire Record Office, ML594.

<sup>122</sup> Northamptonshire Record Office, ML601.

<sup>123</sup> ROLLR, DE 4701/162.

<sup>124</sup> ROLLR, N/M/179/1178.

<sup>125</sup> ROLLR, DE 4701/158.

<sup>126</sup> ROLLR, N/M/179/1178.

<sup>127</sup> *Leicester Mercury* (25 July, 2012), <http://www.thisisleicestershire.co.uk/Milestone-Methodists/story-16589458-detail/story.html>, [accessed 06 August 2012].

<sup>128</sup> *Leicestershire County Council* (2012), <http://www.leics.gov.uk> [accessed 08 August 2012].