

VCH Leicestershire

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Broughton Astley: Post-Reformation Religious History

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HISTORY

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Introduction

The parish of Broughton Astley includes the large village of Broughton Astley itself, together with the villages of Primethorpe (now effectively absorbed within Broughton Astley) and Sutton-in-the-Elms. Dissent flourished from an early date in Primethorpe and Sutton, but appears not to have taken hold in Broughton Astley, in part due to the actions taken by rector William Cotton and his brother Samuel, a county magistrate, to prevent conventicles meeting in Broughton Astley itself.¹

Advowson, Income and Property, by Duncan Wannell

Advowson

Both manor and advowson were in the same hands in 1229, but this unity had ended by the fourteenth century.² In 1580, it was granted by Henry Gray of Pirgo, Essex, to Geoffrey Ithell of Tugby, who in 1582 assigned the next advowson to Thomas Jones for £50, who in turn assigned it the following year to Noe Duckett of Broughton Astley.³ It passed through a succession of other hands before being reunited with the manor by 1715, through the purchase of the advowson from Sir William Halford by Sir Nathan Wrighte, who had purchased the manor from the earl of Stamford in 1679.⁴ Both then passed to George Wrighte, but the advowson soon appears to have been sold again, as by 1727 it was in the hands of mercer John Mundy.⁵ By 1846, the Rev. Charles Fletcher was both lord of the manor and patron of the living.⁶ The advowson then passed to the Radford family, who held it between 1855 and 1895,⁷ and then to the Southwell family by 1908.⁸ In 1940, it was sold by Mrs E. Southwell to Fidelity Trust Ltd as trustees for the Society of St Mary and St Nicholas, Lancing, Sussex,⁹ who continued to hold it until 1982, when ownership passed to Woodard Schools, the owners of Lancing College.¹⁰ In 1996 the ecclesiastical parish was combined with Croft and Stoney Stanton to form a team ministry, with the patrons being Woodard Schools with the Bishop of Leicester and A.I. Steele jointly.¹¹

¹ See below.

² J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1810), IV, 58.

³ C.W. Foster (ed.), *Lincoln Episcopal Records in the time of Thomas Cooper, S.T.P., Bishop of Lincoln, 1571-1584*, Lincoln Record Society, 2 (Lincoln, 1912), 251.

⁴ Nichols, *History*, 60-61.

⁵ Nichols, *History*, 61.

⁶ W. White, *Hist. Gaz. & Dir. of Leics.* (Sheffield, 1846), 360.

⁷ Post Office, *Dir. of Leics.* (1855), p. 21; *Kelly's Dir. of Leics.* (1895), 44.

⁸ *Kelly's Dir. of Leics.* (1908), 49.

⁹ Church of England Records Centre, ECE/7/1/89697.

¹⁰ *Leicester Diocesan Calendar, Clergy List and Year Book 1982* (Leicester, 1982), 115 and *ibid.* 1983 (Leicester, 1983), 115.

¹¹ *Leicester Diocesan Directory, 1996* (Leicester, 1996), 74..

Income

The living was a rectory, with a gross value of £27 1s. 4d. in 1535.¹² The glebe land is first recorded in 1601 as 60 acres 'or better', although it was said that 'In tymes past there hath been an half yard land [about 15 acres] more with a cloase'. That additional land had been lost by an earlier incumbent, 'he being non resident and farminge out his parsonage, was taken away by the Patron, and cannot now be recouered'.¹³ By 1703 the glebe had doubled to 120 acres,¹⁴ perhaps by agreement upon enclosure of the parish in 1637. It remained a similar size until the 1880s.¹⁵ In 1887 the gross estimated rental for the 120 acres of glebe land amounted to £203 10s. 0d.¹⁶ By 1895, the glebe had expanded to 230 acres, but then was reduced by sales to 145 acres by 1904 and to just 22 acres by 1928,¹⁷ with purchasers including Mr. E. E. Benford, who bought Glebe Farm (103 acres) in December 1922.¹⁸ The investment purchased with the proceeds is not recorded. Two further acres were sold in 1932 to the parish council, for use as a burial ground.¹⁹

The open fields of the village were enclosed by agreement in 1637, and a composition agreed for the tithes, initially set at one shilling per acre each year.²⁰ In 1821, a total of £579 11s. 8d. was due annually from those with land in the parish.²¹ In 1845, remaining tithes were commuted and fixed rents set across the whole parish, yielding £519 12s. 9d. annually.²² The tithe rent-charge in 1895 was £370.²³

In 1831, total annual income from all sources was £674,²⁴ increasing to £750 in 1863.²⁵ In 1846, the living was reported as having been thirty years in sequestration,²⁶ perhaps due to the non-residence of rector John Liptrott. Licences for absence were granted to him in 1828, 1834 and 1836 without any reason being stated on the surviving documents,²⁷ and in 1846 and 1848 by virtue of his incapacity, perhaps due to old age.²⁸ The net yearly value of the living was £399 in 1895, increasing to £623 by 1936.²⁹ Church rates were collected without difficulty in the mid-nineteenth century.³⁰

Parsonage

The first record of the parsonage house appears in 1601, when it is described as possessing two barns, a stable, a bake house and some little houses beside, all in good repair. There was also an orchard, garden and small close lying on the west side of the house.³¹ In 1844 the parsonage was

¹² *Valor Eccl. IV*, 185.

¹³ Lincs. Arch., DIOC/TER/5, f. 444

¹⁴ Lincs. Arch., DIOC/TER/13/71

¹⁵ White, *Hist. Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1846), p. 360; *Kelly's Dir.* (1881), 498.

¹⁶ *Glebe Lands* (Parl. Papers 1887 (307), lxiv.11), p. 125.

¹⁷ *Kelly's Dir.* (1904), p. 47; *Kelly's Dir.* (1928), 53.

¹⁸ Church of England Records Centre, ECE/7/1/89697.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Nichols, *The History*, 60.

²¹ Lincs. Arch., DIOC/TER/13/72.

²² White, *Hist. Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1846), 360.

²³ *Kelly's Dir.* (1895), 44.

²⁴ *Ecclesiastical Benefices* (Parl. Papers 1837 (439), xli), p. 50.

²⁵ White, *Hist. Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1863), 780-1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ ROLLR 1D 41/32/14; 1D 41/32/55; 1D 41/32/68.

²⁸ ROLLR 1D 41/32/109; *Non-resident incumbents* (Parl. Papers 1850 (186), xlii), p. 57.

²⁹ *Kelly's Dir.* (1895), p. 44; *Kelly's Dir.* (1936), 49.

³⁰ *Church Rates* (Parl. Papers 1856 (319), xlviii.1), 87.

³¹ Lincs. Arch., DIOC/TER/5, f. 444.

said to have been mostly rebuilt.³² It contained some thirty rooms and outbuildings.³³ The lodge was sold by Miss Charlotte Southwell to the incumbent in 1932 for £100, for the use of all future incumbents.³⁴ In 1957, a new parsonage house was built for £4,526 and the following year the old parsonage was sold for £2,525, for use as residential property.³⁵ The 1957 parsonage was subsequently demolished, and a new house built for the incumbent in the 1990s.³⁶

Religious Life by Kimberley Pullen

St. Mary's church

St Mary's church stands adjacent to a small stream. The building dates from the thirteenth century, although a Norman pillar piscina now standing in the aisle,³⁷ which was found buried in the floor during the 1882 restoration,³⁸ suggests there has been a church here since at least the twelfth century. There is much early fourteenth century work, including the geometric window tracery in the north aisle (seen in the photograph below), although the windows in the south are later and Perpendicular in style.



St Mary's church from the north-east, in 2012

³² White, *Hist. Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1846), 360.

³³ Rev. A. Pritchett, *The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Broughton Astley* (2001), 9.

³⁴ ROLLR, DE 3319/34.

³⁵ ROLLR, DE 3319/36.

³⁶ Pritchett, *The Parish Church*, 9.

³⁷ N. Pevsner (rev. E. Williamson), *Leicestershire and Rutland* (Harmondsworth, 1984), 115.

³⁸ *Leic. Chron.*, 27 May 1882, 6

A report on the building in 1633 identified a need in both church and chancel to mend the lead roof and windows, and to pave the floor.³⁹ The parishioners seem to have embraced their responsibilities more readily than the rector, as in 1778 the archdeacon made no comment about nave and aisle but reported that the paving in the sanctuary and the lead on the chancel roof needed to be repaired and the chancel walls whitewashed. This work was certified as complete in 1780.⁴⁰ Even so, the archdeacon was still able to comment in 1838 that the chancel was ‘not in a good state’; he also noted that the church doors were in need of repair, that new Bibles were needed and the Prayer Book was ‘very dirty’.⁴¹ In 1881 the church was closed for nearly a year for a major restoration, and services were transferred to the schoolroom. The architect was William Basset Smith of Leicester.⁴² The restoration saw £422 being spent on the chancel alone, and another £1,750 on reseating the church,⁴³ and 60 additional free seats were created.⁴⁴ New windows were built or rebuilt, a new tower arch was erected and the chancel arch was replaced.⁴⁵ A grant of £40 from the Incorporated Church Building Society helped to defray some of the cost,⁴⁶ and subscriptions totalling £1,430 had been collected by the time the work was complete.⁴⁷ The reopening was celebrated in grand style, with ‘strings of flowers and evergreens’ hung across the roads through the village.⁴⁸

At this time, church attendance was increasing. Whereas in the 1870s, this would ‘sometimes be good [but] at others short’, by 1881 there were around 130 people attending Sunday morning services and another 180 to 200 on Sunday evenings.⁴⁹ Religious life was becoming more vibrant, as Ascension Day was observed from around the 1870s and communion was held more frequently: once a month in 1881 compared with eight times a year in 1872.⁵⁰ However, religious life may have declined in relation to the growth of the parish. The parish population grew from 746 in 1871 to 1,339 by 1911.⁵¹ Non-conformity was growing (see below), and non-attendance at any church was noticeable. In 1910, the vicar commented that, although most people did attend ‘some place of worship’, it was also true that ‘a good number of men go nowhere and never have so far as I can learn’.⁵²

In 1996 the Broughton Astley Team Ministry was formed, comprising Broughton Astley, Croft and Stoney Stanton.⁵³

³⁹ ROLLR, ID 41/18/7 f. 10v.

⁴⁰ ROLLR, ID41/18/21, f. 95.

⁴¹ ROLLR, 245/50/6, 159-60.

⁴² *Leic. Chron.*, 27 May 1882, 6

⁴³ P.L. Jeanes, *A Short History of Broughton Astley including the Hamlets of Primethorpe and Sutton-in-the-Elms* (Broughton Astley, 1974), 33.

⁴⁴ G.K. Brandwood, ‘Church Building and Restoration in Leicestershire’ (unpub. PhD, University of Leicester, 1984), 478.

⁴⁵ Jeanes, *A Short History*, 33.

⁴⁶ Brandwood, ‘Church Building’, 478

⁴⁷ *Leic. Chron.*, 27 May 1882, 6

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Northamptonshire Record Office (hereafter NRO), ML 594; ML 601.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *VCH Leics. III*, 184.

⁵² NRO Box X926.

⁵³ *Leicester Diocesan Directory, 1996* (Leicester, 1996), 74.

Protestant Nonconformity by Duncan Wannell and Kimberley Pullen (as indicated below)

General

A meeting of Baptists is said to have been held in Broughton Astley in 1647,⁵⁴ but the first formal record of nonconformity in the parish is from 1676, when there were 19 nonconformists of no specified denomination.⁵⁵ Later records suggest that these were most probably a mixture of Baptists and Quakers.

Baptists (by Duncan Wannell)



The Baptist Church at Sutton-in-the-Elms, in 2012

In 1669 rector William Cotton recorded 'Noe conventicle within this parish'.⁵⁶ However Thomas Morley, writing in 1765, described a scattered group of Baptists in south Leicestershire who formed themselves into a church in about 1650, choosing the writer's grandfather Thomas Townsend as their pastor, and meeting in houses in several places alternately, including Sutton-in-the-Elms.⁵⁷ In 1672, John Kitchen was licensed as a Baptist preacher in Lutterworth, with no premises mentioned,⁵⁸ and it has been suggested that this registration might relate to the church at Sutton-in-the-Elms.⁵⁹ This meeting was known colloquially as the Shadow-in-the-Elms, to represent the struggle to hide from persecution.⁶⁰ In 1699, Benjamin Moore of Sutton became co-pastor,⁶¹ and

⁵⁴ G. Fox (ed. J.L. Nickalls), *The Journal of George Fox* (Cambridge, 1952), 18-19.

⁵⁵ A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition* (London, 1986), 260.

⁵⁶ R.H. Evans, 'Nonconformists in Leicestershire in 1669', *Trans LAHS* 25 (1949), p. 133.

⁵⁷ 'Sutton-in-the-Elms and Arnesby', *Trans. of the Baptist Historical Society*, 1 (1909), 181.

⁵⁸ *Cal. SP Dom.*, May-Sept. 1672, 676.

⁵⁹ 'The Midlands Churches of 1651', *Baptist Quarterly*, 2.7 (July 1925), 322-3.

⁶⁰ Broughton Astley Parish Council, <http://broughtonastley.leicestershireparishcouncils.org/a-brief-history.html>, accessed 18 August 2012.

at about this time a plain brick meeting house was built, which still survives as the vestry to the present church of 1815 (see photograph above).⁶² Under Moore, the church became a member of the Particular Baptist Midland Association in 1707,⁶³ and by 1709 it had 62 members.⁶⁴ This seems to have ushered in a period of expansion, and it has been suggested that the church attracted Calvinists from Leicester, who were uneasy attending worship in there as the Leicester Baptist church was General and Particular mixed.⁶⁵ By 1715, the church at Sutton had 150 hearers, of whom 20 were voters.⁶⁶ The meeting house was acknowledged by the Anglican rector in the visitation returns of 1718 and 1721, although he does not give any estimate of the number attending or where they came from.⁶⁷ The Baptist chapel registered as a meeting house in 1758.⁶⁸ In 1829, there were 350 Particular Baptists worshipping in 'One Chapel' in 'Broughton Astley Sutton and Thorpe'.⁶⁹ While it would not be unreasonable to assume this was the chapel in Sutton, the return for the 1851 religious census completed by minister Chesney Burdett records a Particular Baptist Chapel in Primethorpe, erected in 1755, with room for 260 worshippers. Attendance was 100 that morning, and 200 for the afternoon service.⁷⁰



Sutton-in-the-Elms Baptist Church, interior in 2012

⁶¹ A Betteridge, 'Early Baptists in Leicestershire and Rutland', *The Baptist Quarterly*, 25 (1973), 361. Unfortunately, as this article outlines, the original records for this congregation appear to have been destroyed between 1909 and 1973.

⁶² Pevsner, *Leicestershire*, 115-6.

⁶³ 'Sutton-in-the-Elms and Arnesby', *Trans. of the Baptist Historical Society*, 1 (1909), 183

⁶⁴ 'Sutton-in-the-Elms and Arnesby', *Trans. of the Baptist Historical Society*, 1 (1909), 184

⁶⁵ 'Early Leicester Baptists', *The Baptist Quarterly*, 1 (1922), 76.

⁶⁶ John Evans' List of Dissenting Congregations, Dr Williams' Library, MS 34.4, ff. 64-6.

⁶⁷ Lincs. Arch., Gibson 4, 395-8; Gibson 12, 543-6.

⁶⁸ ROLLR, QS 44/2/32.

⁶⁹ ROLLR, QS 95/2/1/6.

⁷⁰ TNA, HO 129/408/17.

Quakers (by Kimberley Pullen)

Although attendance was much lower by the later nineteenth century, with just 67 recorded in 1881, this increased to 105 in 1898, falling back to 46 in 1903 following the death of energetic pastor William Bull, before recovering to 93 in 1911. One factor is thought to be ease of access by train from Leicester.⁷¹ In 1912 the building was extended to the south west.⁷² More recently, the church has expanded its congregation again; from 2009 to 2011 the congregation doubled in size.⁷³

George Fox, founder of the Quakers, attended ‘a great meeting of the Baptists’ at Broughton Astley in 1647, but found few Baptists there and delivered an open-air speech.⁷⁴ However, the Quakers never attracted the same numbers of followers as the Baptists. By the 1670s, the Quaker congregation comprised about fifteen people, who met in the house of Edward Erbery in Primethorpe until around 1681, when they were forced to find another meeting place.⁷⁵ Like the Baptists, Quakers were subjected to persecution before 1689. Preachers were particularly vulnerable if they owned the house where meetings were taking place. In June 1679, informers ransacked the house of Edward Erbery after discovering a meeting there of sixteen people, and took everything above the value of £20. Erbery himself was in prison at the time on account of refusing to swear the Oath of Allegiance.⁷⁶ Rector William Cotton and his brother, a county magistrate, were particularly active in stamping out dissent.⁷⁷ In 1681, the parish officers employed ‘certain rude young Fellows’ to break up a Quaker meeting. Joseph Besse, writing in 1753, describes the incident:

*[Informers] rusht into the Meeting, laid violent Hands on the Persons assembled, pluckt them out of the Meeting, and dragg’d them to and fro in the Dirt, the Officers standing by and reproaching the Sufferers, telling them, “they might have staid at Home.”*⁷⁸

The majority of Quaker men in the parish were eventually arrested.⁷⁹ The women took over, establishing another meeting-house, but it was not until 1689 that persecution came to an end.⁸⁰ By 1691 a house in Sutton had been purchased, by trustees rather than an individual Quaker, to give continuity in a period of greater toleration, and was adapted for the Quakers’ use.⁸¹ Yet the Quakers never expanded significantly after this date. Visitation returns from 1718 and 1721 note only that they existed.⁸² Isaac Woodman registered his house as a meeting house in 1777,⁸³ and although no denomination was given, it is possible that this was a Quaker meeting, as the Baptists had a meeting

⁷¹ G.T. Rimmington, ‘Baptist membership in rural Leicestershire, 1881-194’, *The Baptist Quarterly*, 37 (1998), 388.

⁷² Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England, *An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England* (1986), 119.

⁷³ <http://www.findachurch.co.uk/churches/sp/sp59/site/> [accessed 29 Jul. 2012]

⁷⁴ G. Fox (ed. J.L. Nickalls), *The Journal of George Fox* (Cambridge, 1952), 18-19.

⁷⁵ R.H. Evans, ‘The Quakers of Leicestershire, 1660-1714’ *Trans. Leics. Arch. And Hist. Soc.*, 28 (1952), 67, 69, citing ROLLR, 12D ix 1681.

⁷⁶ J. Besse, *A Collection of the Sufferings of the People Called Quakers* (1753), 337-8; Evans, ‘The Quakers’, 80, citing ROLLR, 12D 39.34, 27 ix 1681.

⁷⁷ Evans, ‘The Quakers’, 81 citing ROLLR, 12D 27 ix 1681.

⁷⁸ Besse, *A Collection*, 340; Evans, ‘The Quakers’, p. 81, citing ROLLR, 12D 27 ix 1681.

⁷⁹ Besse, *A Collection*, 340.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 341.

⁸¹ Evans, ‘The Quakers’, 67, 69 citing ROLLR, 12D 39.1, 30 vii 1681, 39.2, 25 x 1691.

⁸² *Lincs. Arch.*, Gibson 4, 395 – 8; Gibson 12, 543-6; ROLLR, QS 44/1/2.

⁸³ ROLLR, QS 44/1/2.

house in the parish by this date.⁸⁴ There appear to be no subsequent records of Quakers in the parish.

Methodists (by Kimberley Pullen)

The first record of any Methodists in the parish is in 1829, when the meeting house return records some fifty 'Ranters' (Primitive Methodists) who had a licenced meeting house in the parish.⁸⁵ No Methodist chapel was recorded in the religious census of 1851, nor in later directories. The nearest Methodist chapel today is in Countesthorpe.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ See above.

⁸⁵ ROLLR, QS 95/2/1/6.

⁸⁶ *Methodist Church in Britain* [<http://www.methodist.org.uk/links/find-a-church>, accessed 2 Sept. 2012].