

VCH Leicestershire

Online Texts-in-progress

Countesthorpe: Post-Reformation Religious History

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VICTORIA
COUNTY
HISTORY



Leicestershire



Figure 1: St Andrew's Church, Countesthorpe

Advowson, Income and Status from 1878 by James Smalley and Emma Roberts

Countesthorpe became a separate ecclesiastical parish in May 1878 under the patronage of the Bishop of Peterborough, with an endowment of 112 acres of glebe within the township, which then yielded an income of £162 2s. 2d., and an annual stipend of £37 16s. 8d. from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.¹ In 1919, 99 acres of glebe land were sold to Mr Herbert Ernes Orton for £3,000.² The value of the living in 1928, from the investment stock, residual land and stipend, was £304.³

In April 1922, consideration was given to combining the benefice with that of neighbouring Foston.⁴ In 1924, a scheme was approved to create 'The United Benefice of Countesthorpe with

¹ *London Gazette* (31 May 1878), 3361-3.

² Church of England Records Centre (hereafter CERC), N.B. 19/48/86812 (1919)

³ *Kelly's Dir.* (1928), 71

⁴ CERC, 100388 (6 Apr. 1922)

Foston', although the parishes would remain distinct entities in all respects. It would take effect when each of the two incumbents then in place had either resigned or died. The incumbent for the two benefices would then live in Countesthorpe, and the parsonage at Foston would be sold. The appointment of future incumbents would be exercised by the two patrons alternately.⁵ The union finally took place in January 1934 on the death of the vicar of Countesthorpe.⁶ In 1936, the value of the united benefice was £600.⁷ In 1939, the rector of Peatling Parva took over the care of the benefice for a stipend of £200 per annum during the absence of the incumbent, who was serving as Chaplain to the Forces.⁸

The patron of Foston when the scheme was approved was Sir H. Mallaby-Deeley,⁹ but by the time it was implemented, not only had the Countesthorpe patron changed from the Bishop of Peterborough to the Bishop of Leicester, but the Foston patronage had split, with medieties held by Sir H. Mallaby-Deeley and L.H.R Loyd. Initially the arrangement for alternative presentation remained in place,¹⁰ but by 1943 this was proving unsatisfactory to both the bishop and the private patrons, and the latter agreed to transfer their interest to the diocesan board of patronage.¹¹ From 1947 the patron for the united benefice became the bishop and the diocesan board, alternately.¹² The benefice has now expanded to include Peatling Magna (from about 2009) and Willoughby Waterleys (from about 2010).¹³ Ashby Magna, which was previously combined with Peatling Magna and Willoughby Waterleys,¹⁴ did not join them. As the bishop was patron of Peatling Magna and Willoughby Waterleys,¹⁵ the change has not complicated the advowson.

Parsonage by James Smalley and Emma Roberts

The residents of Countesthorpe had sent a deputation to the bishop in 1876 explaining their request to become an independent parish. The bishop urged an objection that there was no parsonage house at Countesthorpe, but it was said that the desire for change was so strong within the township that funds could be raised to build one.¹⁶ Yet although the parish was divided in 1878, it was not until 1890 that steps were taken to provide a house for the incumbent. A subscription raised £400 and the Diocesan society provided £100,¹⁷ and this was matched by a £200 grant from Queen Anne's Bounty and £300 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.¹⁸ The house, which cost £1,025, was completed in 1893.¹⁹ In 1923 it was described as having a garage, stable, foul-house,

⁵ *London Gazette* (22 Feb. 1924), 1559-1560.

⁶ CERC, 72451 (11 Jan. 1934).

⁷ *Kelly's Dir.* (1936), 70

⁸ CERC, NB.19/48/72451 (11 Oct. 1939).

⁹ *Peterborough Diocesan Calendar, Clergy List and Almanack, 1926* (Leicester, 1926), 138.

¹⁰ *Leicester Diocesan Calendar, Clergy List and Year Book, 1937* (Leicester, 1937), 101.

¹¹ CERC, N.B. 19/48/72451 (1943)

¹² *Leicester Diocesan Calendar, Clergy List and Year Book, 1947* (Leicester, 1947), 91.

¹³ Information from church member, September 2012.

¹⁴ *Leicester Diocesan Directory, 1999* (Leicester, 1999), 81.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Leic. Chron.* (12 Aug. 1876), 9

¹⁷ CERC N.B.19/48/53867 (1890)

¹⁸ CERC N.B.19/48/72451 (2 Mar. 1891).

¹⁹ CERC N.B. 19/48/72451 (1893)

wood-house and a store room for fruit. Inside were three small living rooms, seven bedrooms, a dressing room and three small rooms in a gardener's wing.²⁰ It continued to be the house for the incumbent of the benefice after the parish was united with Foston in 1934.²¹

The Anglican Church by Emma Roberts and Pam Fisher

Religious life

The number of communicants in 1676 was said to be 168.²² By 1721 that number was little changed, at 150, although fewer than 30 people actually took communion when it was offered. There was then just one Sunday service most weeks, with a second Sunday service in every third week.²³

The 1851 religious census recorded an actual attendance of 142 at the only service that day (in the afternoon), which it was claimed was less than the usual attendance.²⁴ By 1872, communion was given eight times each year, but the number of communicants was just 20-30. Like Blaby, attendance at morning services was said to be 'rather scanty', and there was no service in the afternoon, but there was an evening service, where the congregation was said to be 'very full', and increasing.²⁵ In 1910 the usual number of communicants was about 30, but 80 at the major festivals. Congregations of 300 people were seen and the Lord's Day was said to be 'very well & quietly observed' in the parish.²⁶

Building

An engraving of Countesthorpe church in around 1810²⁷ shows an undistinguished building with apparent plate tracery in the north, suggesting a date no later than around 1250. Only the perpendicular tower now remains from this medieval building.²⁸ In the late 18th century the condition of the church does not seem to have been a concern. A visitation report of 1779 listed little more than the need for a new door to the chancel, a new font cover and new weather boards for the bell chamber. In addition the incumbent was to see that two families' pews were repaired and a garden that was encroaching on church land was removed. It was certified the following Easter that all the requirements had been met.²⁹ Writing in 1810, Nichols described the neatness of the church's tower, 'surmounted by handsome pinnacles' and the roof, which was 'wholly covered with Swithland slate'.³⁰

²⁰ CERC N.B. 19/48/53867 (1923)

²¹ *London Gazette* (22 Feb. 1924), 1559-1560.

²² A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition*, (London, 1986), 336

²³ Lincolnshire Archives, Gibson 4, 391-4; Gibson 12, 547-50.

²⁴ TNA: PRO, HO 129/411/20.

²⁵ Northamptonshire RO, ML 594.

²⁶ Northamptonshire RO, Box X926.

²⁷ J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester* (1810), IV, 52-3.

²⁸ N. Pevsner (rev. E. Williamson), *Leicestershire and Rutland* (Harmondsworth, 1984), 142

²⁹ ROLLR, ID/41/21, f. 51v.

³⁰ Nichols, *History*, 57

Although the main issue identified at the visitation in 1838 was simply an accumulation of dust and dirt,³¹ the following year plans were submitted and approved for a rebuilding of the church.³² A faculty was granted in March 1841, on the grounds that the building was in a 'dilapidated state', for taking down and rebuilding the main body of the church and widening it, but the chancel and tower were to be left untouched, other than tying them into the new building.³³ Advertisements were placed for 'persons desirous of Contracting for the Pulling Down, Re-building, and Enlarging of the Church', who were desired to view the plans at architect Henry Goddard's office.³⁴ By the 1842 visitation the work was complete, and the chancel was also described as 'new', beginning 'exactly where the old chancel began'.³⁵ The result was the creation of an aisleless building of auditory proportions, with a gallery and pointed brick-lined windows.³⁶ The 163 seats in the earlier building had been increased to 375, of which 170 were free.³⁷ Many of these were in box pews with seats facing in different directions.³⁸ Other seats were on a wide gallery, which stretched across the whole of the west end of the church.³⁹ A £100 grant was received from the newly created Incorporated Church Building Society,⁴⁰ but the majority of the cost of £1,000 was raised by subscription.⁴¹ A photograph of the interior of the church at this time shows that the walls were whitewashed and that the chancel and the nave were almost completely separated by a wall and an archway that included a wooden chancel screen. For the majority of the congregation, the altar would have been largely obscured from view.⁴² Goddard's design showed 'blissful ignorance of ecclesiology'.⁴³ In 1878 the building was described as looking like 'a very old-fashioned meeting house [with] a pretty little chancel and an ancient Gothic tower', and surprise was expressed that such a relatively new Anglican church should have been conceived in a form that 'Dissenters themselves have long been busy improving away'.⁴⁴

A minor restoration in 1883 resulted in a short period of closure,⁴⁵ then in 1889 the chancel was renovated and a choir vestry built.⁴⁶ Plans to rebuild the nave with funding from the Incorporated Church Building Society were rejected,⁴⁷ but the rebuilding went ahead in 1907 under the direction of T.P. Bown of Leicester.⁴⁸ Two narrow aisles were created in the nave space by the insertion of arcades created with brick pillars, the nave area was enlarged at the expense of the

³¹ ROLLR, 1850'245/50/6, f. 83.

³² Lambeth Palace Library, *ICBS minute book*, vol.10 f. 26ff., Church Plans (2012), <http://www.churchplansonline.org/>, [accessed 13 September 2012]

³³ ROLLR, DE 1465/30/1.

³⁴ *Leic. Chron.* (4 April 1840), 1.

³⁵ ROLLR, 1850'245/50/8, f. 49

³⁶ G.K. Brandwood, 'Church Building and Restoration in Leicestershire' (Univ. of Leicester, PhD thesis, 1984), 80.

³⁷ ROLLR, DE 1465/30/6.

³⁸ Brandwood, 'Church Building' 49, 100.

³⁹ *Leic. Chron.* (13 July 1878), 6

⁴⁰ Brandwood, 'Church Building', 256.

⁴¹ W. White, *History, Gazetteer & Directory of Leicestershire & Rutland* (Sheffield, 1846), 379

⁴² A. True, *A pictorial History of Countesthorpe* (Countesthorpe, 1991), 18.

⁴³ Brandwood, 'Church building', 272.

⁴⁴ *Leic. Chron.* (13 July 1878), 6.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (30 June 1883) 8.

⁴⁶ *Assoc. Archit. and Archaeol. Soc. Rpt*, 20 (1889), lx.

⁴⁷ Lambeth Palace Library, *ICBS minute book*, vol. 30, 286.

⁴⁸ Brandwood, 'Church building', 448.

chancel,⁴⁹ the separating wall was removed and the plaster removed from the walls.⁵⁰ The total cost was £952, and the church received a grant from the Church Extension Board.⁵¹ The carved oak pulpit was added at this time, a bequest from the will of Reverend G.C. Wing, late vicar of Foston.⁵² The church has remained largely unchanged since, although the pews were removed in 2004 and replaced with chairs to enable the nave to be used more flexibly for a wider variety of community events in addition to church services.⁵³

The grave yard which surrounded the church was converted into a garden of rest in 1953, when headstones were removed and laid along the perimeter of the graveyard. In addition, several trees were removed and paving added for greater ease of access.⁵⁴

Protestant Nonconformity by Emma Roberts

Early dissent

In 1676, Countesthorpe had twelve nonconformists.⁵⁵ The visitation return of 1718 lists a family of 'Obstinate Anabaptists', and that for 1721 mentions two small families of Anabaptists. An intriguing addition is also included in the 1718 return of 'two aged people' who are said to belong to the 'Family of Love', but no mention is made of them in the 1721 return. No licensed meeting houses were noted in the visitation returns of 1718 and 1721.⁵⁶ Licences were granted for Protestant Dissenters in 1783 for Benjamin Christian's house, in 1794 for Joseph Beale's house⁵⁷ and in 1796 for Joseph Humfrey's house.⁵⁸ Two licences were issued in 1800, one of these being specifically for a Baptist meeting,⁵⁹ and it is likely that the Baptist licence is the one recorded in another contemporary listing as a licence for 'a Building upon Benjamin Christian's premises',⁶⁰ suggesting either a purpose-built chapel or a converted outhouse.

Baptist

No original records survive documenting the early history of the Baptists in Countesthorpe, and memories have produced conflicting accounts. In 1878 it was said that the first dissenters in Countesthorpe began to attend the Baptist Church at Arnesby from 1738, and that their first meeting in Countesthorpe was in about 1790 in the house of an 80-year-old woman. It was said that their first chapel was built shortly afterwards, and was affiliated to the Particular Baptist church in

⁴⁹ H. Schultka and A. True, *Around Countesthorpe* (Stroud, 1999), 11.

⁵⁰ True, *Pictorial History*, 19.

⁵¹ *Assoc. Archit. and Archaeol. Soc. Rpt*, 29 (1907-8), xxxviii

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ R. Holdridge, interview by author, 14 September 2012.

⁵⁴ ROLLR, DE 1731/1.

⁵⁵ A. Whiteman, *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition*, (London, 1986), 336.

⁵⁶ *Lincs. Arch.*, Gibson 4, 392; Gibson 12, p.548.

⁵⁷ ROLLR, QS 44/2/96; QS 44/1/2.

⁵⁸ ROLLR, QS 44/2/112; QS 44/1/2.

⁵⁹ ROLLR, QS 44/2/133; QS 44/2/135.

⁶⁰ ROLLR, QS 44/1/2.

Arnesby.⁶¹ Another account says that the Baptist congregation in Countesthorpe was established in about 1800, when a group of dissenters came from Wigston Magna, and built their first chapel in 1810.⁶² Both sources agree that this first chapel was rebuilt in 1829. That year, there were 300 Baptists meeting in the village for worship, more than at Blaby.⁶³ The building was known simply as the Dissenters' Chapel in 1851, and was used by Particular Baptists and Independents in 1846 and 1851, when it had seating for 230 people. There was only one service on 30 March 1851, in the evening, attended by 175 worshippers, with 40 people attending an evening Sunday School.⁶⁴ It is said that members attended the Particular Baptist Church at Arnesby on Sunday mornings until 1863.⁶⁵ That year a new chapel was built, at a cost of c.£1,000,⁶⁶ on land adjacent to the previous chapel, and the congregation formally split from that at Arnesby.⁶⁷ The new chapel could accommodate 356 worshippers.⁶⁸

This church is an Independent Reformed and Particular Baptist Church in 2022, holding two services each Sunday, with several regular faith, fellowship and social meetings in addition, including prayer breakfasts, bible studies, 'tots and tea' and a table tennis group.⁶⁹



Figure 2: Baptist Chapel, Countesthorpe.

⁶¹ *Leic. Chron.*, 13 July 1878, 6.

⁶² ROLLR, DE 1743/1.

⁶³ ROLLR, QS 95/2/1/13; QS 95/2/1/5, 1829.

⁶⁴ TNA, HO 129/411/25; W. White, *History, Gazetteer & Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (Sheffield, 1846), 379.

⁶⁵ *Leic. Chron.*, 13 July 1878, 6.

⁶⁶ White, *Hist., Gaz.* (Sheffield, 1877), 196.

⁶⁷ ROLLR, DE 1743/1.

⁶⁸ *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire* (London, 1941), 1143.

⁶⁹ Ex inf. Pastor Aubrey Vaughan; <http://countesthorpebaptist.co.uk/ministries.html> (accessed 26 Jan. 2022).

Independents

Little is known about this group. They were not noted in the village in 1829.⁷⁰ They shared a chapel with the Baptists in 1851.⁷¹ They were still worshipping in the village in 1872.⁷²

⁷⁰ ROLLR, QS 95/2/1/13.

⁷¹ TNA:PRO, HO 129/411/25.

⁷² Northamptonshire Record Office, ML594.

Methodist



Figure 3: Methodist Chapel, Countesthorpe.

Fifty Primitive Methodists are listed within Countesthorpe in 1829, and they had one building.⁷³ The religious census lists that another building was built in 1841, with 150 sittings.⁷⁴ The building in use today was built in 1888, with an extension added in 1925. Various groups were invited to lay stones during the construction, and several were engraved to record the people who laid them. In 1837, three youths were convicted for disputing the religious worship of this congregation by standing at the door singing in ‘a tone of mockery’. The Rector of Blaby was one of the presiding magistrates and took the opportunity to comment from the bench that the singing of the Primitive Methodists themselves was so loud that it disturbed him at his desk in Blaby, and his curate had been forced to find alternative lodgings.⁷⁵ In response, the Primitive Methodist minister roundly criticised the Rector through the medium of the local press for his ‘indecorous attack’.⁷⁶

Non-Christian faiths

In 2001, less than one per cent of the population within Countesthorpe belonged to a non-Christian faith and there is no non-Christian place of worship within the village.⁷⁷

⁷³ ROLLR, QS 95/2/1/13.

⁷⁴ TNA: PRO, HO 129/411/24.

⁷⁵ *Leic. Chron.* 28 Jan. 1837, p.4.

⁷⁶ *Leic. Chron.* 4 Feb. 1837, p.2.

⁷⁷ *Leicestershire County Council* (2012), <http://www.leics.gov.uk> [accessed 08 August 2012].