

“HE WHO WOULD VALLIANT BE....”

The Story of the Strict Baptists of Danehill by Hylda Rawlings

Tucked away in the front garden of Christopher Fields (Church Lane, Danehill) is a tiny brick building which, though small and inconspicuous, has played an important part in the history of our parish. This little building was erected as our first non-conformist chapel, later became a school-house and later still the Victorian equivalent of a 'granny flat'. Another time we hope to narrate the story of Christopher Fields and the further uses of this little building, but for the purposes of this article we will deal with the chapel and its successor in Danehill village - the account of the little band of pioneers who laid the foundation of the non-conformist movement in this district.

On the 16th day of May 1806, James Langridge of Fletching in the county of Sussex, yeoman, made his will in which he bequeathed to his son James Langridge of Newick, wheelwright, his house and lands called 'Christopher's Field' "where I now dwell", and to his son William Langridge his 'Customary Cottage and small piece of land at Danehill in the Parish of Horsted Keynes' (5) on the map). The joint Executors were named as Richard Bax of Chailey, yeoman (the testator's brother-in-law) and Peter Wells of 'Hurstperpoint', Shop-keeper. Except for the bequests already mentioned, the remainder of the estate was placed in their trust for the education and maintenance of his daughter Hannah. When she became twenty-one £100 was to be paid to William Langridge and the balance to be shared equally between the three daughters 'Elizabeth the Wife of William Browning (Landlord of the 'Red Lion', now The White House No.29 on map), Mary the Wife of William Holford and Hannah Langridge ⁽¹⁾. The Will is duly signed, and witnessed by John Wood, Amos Tulley and Peter Penfold. A very business-like, straightforward Will.

However, five months later on September the 12th, James Langridge added a codicil, which reads as follows: "I further give and bequith to the Perticklar Baptist Church (* Danehill became an ecclesiastical parish in 1851.) assembling at Forest Row under the Pastoral Care of Joseph Terry and James Langridge. The sole Use of that litle Building witch I have built for the Publick Worship of God standing in my Garden in the Front of my House sittuate at Dane Hill in the Parish of Fletching joining the Turnpike Road. To have and to hold for the Publick Preaching of the Gosple so long as there shall be a perticlor Baptist Church at Row maintaining three equal Persons in the Godhead Eternall and personable Election to Holyness here and eternall Life hereafter" .., (he continues for several more sentences giving the doctrines of his faith)... and then "It is my Will and Pleasure that they shall have the Liberty to inlarge the above Building 10 or 12 Feet to the Westward if required at the Church Expencc and the Church to keep the aforesaid Building in Repair during the Time there shall be a Church at Forest Row paying yearly the Sum of five Shillings to my Heirs or Assines...."

His signature is witnessed by Jas Terry, Henry Uridge, Daniel Jackson and William Holford.

By the deterioration in the spelling and the totally different style the codicil was obviously not written by the one who penned the main Will. It is also apparent that between the months of May and November James Langridge had had deep religious experience.

The Will and Codicil were proved on the 13th day of November 1806 by the Executors Richard Bax and Peter Wells.

The faithful little band of friends and kinsmen of the Langridge family, led by James Langridge the younger, "met regularly and were content to carry an in this humble way, hardly expecting to see any strange faces in their midst." But four years later in 1810 a most exciting event happened to alter completely the lives of the little community. A young man (aged 29) called William Roberts came to the village to look for work. He was still officially a serving soldier, having been pressed into the army eleven years previously. As a soldier, he had travelled, served in Ireland during the Rebellion and "as a stranger to God and Godliness he had drank deeply of the cup of sin until the Lord in his grace stopped him in his mad career!" ⁽²⁾

Why did Roberts come to look for work in Danehill? Perhaps he knew or was related to one of the little flock. At any rate, he was very soon eagerly welcomed, obtained lodgings in the village and was asked to preach at the little chapel. He was so persuasive and eloquent that many people came to hear him and the little chapel could not contain the number of People attracted, and eventually the meetings had to be held in a local barn.

The Baptists at Danehill asked him to stay with them as their minister and they collected enough money among themselves to obtain his discharge from the Army.

The sect was still very poor; there was no prospect of paying William Roberts a regular stipend. How then was he to live and continue his work?

In 1815 William Langridge conveyed the cottage in Danehill (5) Village left to him by his father to his brother-in-law William Browning who, in 1822, transferred it to William Roberts, and the latter was officially appointed pastor of the Strict Baptists in Danehill on the 28th May 1815. It is possible that he had already moved into the cottage by that time. At any rate, in 1823 he surrendered it to a group of trustees to hold as a chapel and meeting house. They built the chapel on one side of the cottage (4 on the map) and added a shop on the other to provide a source of income for their minister.

In 1834 a second chapel was founded at Newick and William Roberts was pastor of both. He held services at Danehill on Sunday mornings and in the afternoon and evenings at Newick. ⁽²⁾

William Roberts stayed until 1843 when he left to work at Deal. His successor to the combined chapels was John Poynder (from near Huddersfield) who was to be here for seven years. Early in his ministry the Old Church book from the Newick. chapel notes: “..It was agreed that an evening service be held at Newick and that the brass chandelier should be removed from Danehill on the understanding that if it was wanted it should be returned”.

Joseph Warren, who came to Danehill (after an interregnum) in 1853, was the last resident pastor. When he left, the chapel became dependant on supply preachers; the congregation gradually dwindled and the chapel was used less and less. Up to twenty years ago an occasional service took place, but finally the chapel door was closed and the chapel stood empty.

It was sold to Mr and Mrs Turner who already owned Danehill Stores. They obtained permission to convert the chapel building into a private house for their use. When they left the district the stores and cottage (5) were bought by Mr and Mrs Dowling, and Chapel Cottage (4) by Mr and Mrs Bailey, who re-named their property “Roberts Warren” after the first and last resident pastors.

The information for this article has been largely obtained from:

- (1) The will of James Langridge. E.S.R.O. A69, pp. 820-30
- (2) “The Strict Baptist Chapels of England” by Ralph F. Chambers. Vol.2 P 108-10.
- (3) The Court Books of the Manor of Broadhurst/Horsted Keynes. E.S.R.O. Glynde.

Extract from Danehill Parish Historical Society Magazine Vol. 2 No.4 April 1983

The following reports on the 'Danehill Case' were taken from copies of the "Sussex Agricultural Express" dated 15th May, 1852 - Editor.

DANEHILL

THE CHAPEL The extraordinary scenes that have lately been enacted at the Baptist Chapel are at length brought to a close (see the Cuckfield bench report) and for the sake of the respectability of the neighbourhood it is well they are so for it has raised the village an unenviable notoriety for miles around. On the 25th April the forcible ejection of Mr. Poinder from the pulpit took place that gave rise to the proceedings before the Cuckfield magistrates, and there being every reason to suppose that the same scene would be re-enacted on the following Sunday, Col. Davis desired Capt. Bolton E.S.C. to attend with a sufficient police force to stay a riot, and accordingly five officers were placed on duty to watch the proceedings in a place of worship. From six in the morning, the place was besieged, an unlicensed preacher had ascended the pulpit, and the party amused themselves by singing hymns until between ten and eleven, when Mr. Poinder made his appearance and took up a position at the bottom of the pulpit stairs. An indescribable scene occurred, for as soon as the party gave out a hymn, the opposite party would give out a counter one, thus by singing against each other making discordant and hideous noises that were a disgrace to a place of worship. There was no service, and the warfare was ended by one side reading from an Act of Parliament, and the other from an agreement, or something of the kind, respecting the rules of the church, but little was understood by those around of the matter.

On last Sunday the scene was more peaceful, and we found only two police officers parading in part of the chapel, an old sow feeding in the yard, and the congregation in full force singing, they having been at it since eight o'clock. This was about eleven. On walking into the chapel, we found an old man, an agricultural labourer, but who has taken out a license to preach during the week, placed in the pulpit, dressed in a rusty looking round frock. Mr. Poinder was standing at the foot of the pulpit stairs and a person was perched on them to prevent his ascending. The chapel was filled, but it was evident, from observations that fell from parties around us, that the greatest part were drawn together by curiosity, and not from a desire to worship. The person in the pulpit made a kind of address, but it was somewhat extravagant and a farmer observed to us that he might as well put up his old sheep dog. After some more singing, as they called it, but it was outrageously ridiculous, it was announced that there would be no service in the afternoon; and the parties went their way. Some time since, the windows were missing from the chapel, and after a time found in the dipping hole, the lock of which they had forced, and various other indignities were practised, repulsive to a

well ordered mind, and the cowardly insults and annoyances towards Mr. Poinder were disgraceful, for let the faults of the reverend gentleman be what they may, it is an unmanly mode of resentment. Happily these squabbles are ended, and we hope, as Mr. Norman said on the bench, to hear no more of them.

ESRO Microfilm XA 28/18 Sussex Agricultural Express. May 15 1852

Cuckfield Petty Session May 10.

Present; J.N. Norman Esq, Chairman, N. Borrer & J.H. Slater, Jun, Esquires

THE DANEHILL CASE

Poinder v Gibbs.

Mr. Langham of Uckfield for complainant, Mr. Black of Brighton for defendant.

Mr. Langham stated that this was a case of assault arising out of the following circumstances. Mr. Poinder had been Minister of the Baptist Church at Danehill and Newick for seven or eight years, and some dissatisfaction having manifested itself some months ago, led to disunion among them, and several of the congregation left the Chapel at Danehill, and established themselves in another place of worship, but after a time came back and commenced a number of annoyances against Mr. Poinder that led to the proceedings.

On Sunday 25th April Mr. Poinder, as pastor, went to open the Chapel but found it had been forced and a person occupying the pulpit and preventing him going there. They were holding a service, he waited for the singing to finish and then started to go up the steps of the pulpit. He was pinioned by three persons and taken back. He then called Mr. Huggett, one of the deacons for assistance but he too was assaulted by the defendant and Benjamin Newnham. The person in the pulpit had previously left the Chapel and took it on himself to return and oust the regular minister.

Sworn Evidence of the Rev: John Poinder. "I am minister of the Baptist Chapels of Danehill and Newick and have been for eight years. The congregations of both chapels form one body and take part of the proceedings in each Chapel" (He then retells going to the chapel and being assaulted) "The defendant was assisted in the assault by Henry Elsey and Thomas Langridge. After the assault, in which the banisters of the pulpit was broken, a constable was called and drew his staff "....."The man in the pulpit was Lashmer Sherlock who was not an ordained minister and at that time was not a licenced preacher. He may have conducted a prayer meeting during the time I was Minister but no more. I (Rev. Poinder) am a regularly ordained Baptist Minister "I do not produce the agreement for which you have given notice and decline to do so. I have received no notice to give up the Chapel. I certainly received a paper from two persons one was a deacon, I do not acknowledge the other. This man pushed me down the pulpit steps James Sherlock and Benjamin Newnham came to my house in June 1851 and left a paper. I did not look at it and threw it out the window. James Sherlock was not a member of my church I had no reason to think the paper was notice to leave the church. By their action under the rules of the church they have excommunicated themselves".

(Summary)

A deed of purchase and a copy of surrender from the Court Rolls of Horsted Keynes Manor were put in; admitting Thomas Moon, R. Stevens, William Elliott, Lashmer Sherlock and two others as tenants in trust of certain copyhold properties, the site of Danehill Chapel. The man in the pulpit was Lashmer Sherlock. The Rev: Poinder stated he had received pay from both places up to yesterday but there was no collection at Danehill but there had been in November and February last. He had sent his two deacons to Lashmer Sherlock offering to come to an agreement.

The magistrate hoped the parties would come to some agreement.

The court was crowded and afterwards the parties held a meeting downstairs to which a reporter was called and was told that the parties had come to an amicable agreement and the other summons pending on the case was withdrawn. Mr. Poinder to have the free use of the Chapel in May and to preach a farewell sermon on the last Sunday after which he would leave.

ESRO Microfilm XA 28/18. Sussex Agricultural Express. 22nd of May 1852

DANEHILL. The Baptist Chapel

Dear Sir,

The Church or Society assembling at Danehill Chapel, utterly averse to entering into an angry discussion with their late pastor, would have passed unobserved the paragraph headed 'Danehill', in the Express of the 15th instant, had not the parties attempted by glaring falsehoods to make the matter appear 'confusion worse confounded'.

An eye witness of the whole, wishes to inform the public that the whole circumstances is greatly misrepresented, and would refer any person desiring to know the truth, as what did occur to the constable of the parish, who was present on the first Sunday, or to his predecessor who was present on the two succeeding Sundays, and any member of another church feeling desirous to be informed why such proceedings were adopted, may apply to the deacons of the church who will produce minutes of the resolutions of the Church. And other circumstances, which will, I presume, account for such a method of taking possession.

Here, we wish the matter to rest, and shall not, after such reference, feel ourselves bound to answer any further statements that may be made, whether abusive or otherwise; but once, or all, request the public if in any doubt should arise as to which gives a truthful version, to be guided by plain evidence given, or which will be given if required, on the veracity of disinterested eyewitnesses, rather than by anonymous writers.

I am etc, Richard Pannett, Wood Brooks, Chailey. May15th 1852

(Our Correspondent seems to imagine the phrase "if any doubt should arise which gives a true version" that he has given a version of the matter - a point in which he is entirely deceived).

(5) DANEHILL STORES.

From Vol.1 No. 10. The Development of Danehill Village up to 1840 by James Rawlings. Moving across the road from The White House, the earliest record I have found for the island. site now occupied by the Danehill Stores (5) was in 1637 when John Masson had a cottage, garden and smith's shop there. In the days of timber framed buildings, blacksmiths' shops were often permitted to be built on village greens because of the danger of fire. How long this one remained there we do not know. The records continue to refer to a smith's shop up to 1672 when Thomas Awcocke, a butcher, was admitted. The next entry when he died, in 1708, described the property as a cottage and parcel of land. Similar wording was used thereafter. This change in the description is paralleled by Mrs Holt's finding that the earliest part of the present building dates from the end of the 17th century. This suggests that the original cottage and perhaps the forge had been demolished during the time Thomas Awcocke held it. His Widow held the property until 1718. Certainly, the forge was no longer there in 1823 when the holding was sold to the Trustees of the Strict Baptists. They built a chapel (4) alongside the house, to which they added a shop to provide a living for their minister, William Roberts.

From Vol 1 No. 10 DANEHILL:- The VILLAGE CENTRE by Margaret Holt

THE POST OFFICE (5)

The original structure comprises a small timber-framed cottage and this has been enlarged in several stages. The roof and front wall have also been altered in order to raise the height of the rooms and sash windows have been inserted. There are a number of timbers showing in the earlier section of the house, including a bressummer indicating the position of a small bedroom fireplace, and one well shaped root-stock remains. The old Chapel building was constructed at right angles to the original cottage, with good brickwork, and still retains a large blank arch in the south wall.

From Volume 1 No.10 Trades and Occupations 1840-1900 by Phil Lucas

Grocers (2) SHOP AT 5

[HKC = Horsted Keynes Census; K = Kelly'd Directory]

1840 Horsted Keynes Tithe Owned by Trustees of Chapel.

1841	HKC	William ROBERTS, Independent Minister. (See Chapel history)
1851	HKC	No Shopkeeper shown; probably Henry HOADLEY
1855 -1878	K	Henry HOADLEY, Shopkeeper, Danehill
1861	HKC	John HOADLEY,aged 22, Grocer and Draper
1871	HKC	Grocer's shop; John HOADLEY, aged 32
1895 -1907	K	Edward HOADLEY, Grocer and P.O.
1915 -1927	K	Stanley CHANDLEY, Grocer and Draper.
1938	K	John BRISTOW, Stores, Danehill