

WALKFORD 1958

Like so many of the small villages around Christchurch, Walkford's popularity as a residential district has increased rapidly during the past few years.

But in the days when Highcliffe was known as Newtown and the district was purely agricultural, Walkford was practically non-existent save for a few cottages.

The village has very little known history, but it is said that the four assassins of Thomas A'Becket were granted sanctuary at the original Amberwood House by Henry II.

For the past 130 years a good deal of the village life has centred round the Cranemoor Congregational Church which celebrated its centenary in September 1929. To mark its 100th birthday a fund was started to provide a resident minister and the celebrations were met with "great joy and enthusiasm".

"POWERFUL SERMON"

Special services were held on the Sunday, the Rev. Thomas Yates preaching in the morning and Mr. C. R. Winter, of Bournemouth, in the evening, and on the Wednesday afternoon, the Rev. J. D. Jones preached a "powerful sermon", followed by tea on the lawn at Amberwood, over 200 people sitting down.

On the Wednesday evening there was a crowded public meeting, presided over by Ald. Frank A. Lane. Speakers were the Rev. Dr. Jones, the Rev. Leslie Tizard, of Albion Congregational Church, Southampton, and the Rev. Howard P. James (the pastor).

Mr. Tovey, the hon. treasurer, read the balance sheet for the year which showed total receipts of £61 18s 4d. They started the year with a deficit of £19 17s. Id. and finished with a balance in hand of £6 0s. 2d. Ald. Lane told the audience that this was the third centenary at which he had presided during the past 15 months, the two previous ones being at Throop and Ripley which, he thought, was both unique and a record.

CHOIR TRAVELLED BY WAGON



He was glad to be at the Cranemoor celebrations for two reasons. First, he attended the jubilee of the church when he remembered the Christchurch choir coming over in a wagon lent by Mr. Aldridge, corn merchant, of Christchurch.

His second reason was that he bore the same name as one of the earliest workers of their church, Mr. William Lane, his uncle.

Ald. Lane said Highcliffe was growing rapidly and "seemed likely to become a popular seaside resort in course of time". For that reason he hoped that those who had received the circular

This was once a familiar sight in Walkford. Mrs. Mary Braddyll (left) of the old Amberwood House, and her friend, Miss Meller, were often seen about the village in Mrs. Braddyll's open carriage, driven by her coachman, Mr. Robert Shave. The picture was loaned to us by Mrs. K. E. Withers, a former maid at Amberwood.

regarding the Centenary Fund would realise that it was an endeavour to come into line with the new conditions.

Referring to the past 100 year's history of Cranemoor, the speaker mentioned the names of three People who had been connected with the church. They were Mr. James Clarke and Mr. Mark Peckham, who had been connected with it for over 50 years, and Mr. L. Frampton. Ald. Lane told his audience: "There seems some amount of confusion as to the actual date of the commencement of the cause; while we are celebrating the centenary today, yet the date is give in the year book as 1828. But I think it must have been in 1825, for only a few days ago there came into my possession a certificate dated October 1, 1825".

This certificate stated: "A certain building situate in the Parish of Christchurch in the occupation of Nicholas Verge is set apart by a congregation of His Majesty's Protestant subjects dissenting from the Church of England as and for a place of Public Worship and Service of Almighty God". This was signed by C. Wooldridge, Deputy Registrar.

Ald. Lane said he believed Mr. Henry Abbott, of Christchurch, was the first pioneer, and it appeared he was joined by William Lane about 1828 or 1829 for in a diary covering the years 1846 to 1859, kept by W. Lane, there was a note written at the close of 1858 which stated: "One source of regret we have is the continued illness of my long tried and much valued helper, Henry Abbott; our fellowship was pleasant and without interruption for nearly 30 years and we fell not out by the way".

Ald. Lane continued: "in Its early days the cause was always referred to as Hinton as, I suppose, the house of Mr. Verge was at Hinton.

"The gatherings appear to have been so well attended that a wall between two rooms was removed to make it large enough for the congregation, but this soon proved too small, for it was not long before a barn was secured on Cranemoor Common.

"The friends considered they were quite set up, having secured the barn, but another step forward was taken about eight years from the beginning in Mr. Verge's cottage, for another certificate dated December 23, 1833, speaks of a certain building recently erected for a meeting house situate at Walkford."

Given by Mr. Bramble, of Gore Farm, the site was about an acre. The intention was to build a chapel and cottage, also to provide a burial ground, but the land was never used for the latter purpose.

The friends at Christchurch were looking for means to erect the buildings and at that time there was a man living at Burton named Mr. Jesse Hall, whose sister was the wife of Dr. James Kemp-Welch, of Christchurch.

Mr. Hall met with a gun accident at Waterditch, which ended fatally, but during the time he was "laid aside" and knowing the circumstances; he left a sum of money for the purpose of erecting the buildings at Cranemoor.

Reason why no tablet was placed in the chapel recording this gift of Mr. Jesse Hall was "the great aversion held by the Rev. Daniel Gunn to any such tablets being placed on the walls of places of worship as being too much identified with the chapels to saints found in Roman Catholic churches".

Mr. Gunn's successors did not hold the same view, so the church has the two tablets in memory of Mr. William Lane and Mr. Henry West Jenkins, who for 42 years "continued the faithful work Sunday by Sunday, as well as frequent week evening meetings without a break".

LAY SUPERINTENDENTS.

Mr. William Lane carried on the work for 28 years which meant that the church had only two lay superintendents for a period of 70 years.

In his address to the centenary audience, the Rev. Leslie Tizard remarked: "I wonder what Highcliffe will be like when the bicentenary comes. That thought came to me as we sat on the crowded beach this afternoon. "Will our church stand then in the midst of a nourishing seaside town and Bournemouth be absorbed in the County Borough of Highcliffe, with Richmond Hill as a mission station? (laughter)".

Remembering the centenary celebrations is Miss Ethel Nicholls, caretaker of the church, and former Sunday School superintendent, who lives in the nearby cottage.

She remembers, too, Mr. Henry West Jenkins, a former Mayor of Christchurch. "He was a marvellous man, we all adored him," she said. "He used to come every Sunday from Christchurch in his horse-drawn dog-trap."

SUNDAY SCHOOL OUTINGS.



Miss E. Nicholls, a member of Cranemoor Congregational Church for many years.

Miss Nicholls, whose step-father, Mr. William Gosling, was caretaker before her, came to Walkford at the age of eight. She recalled the Sunday school outings to Sopley Park when the children were taken in farm wagons. "I think we enjoyed it a lot more than the children who now go long distances in coaches."

When they arrived at Sopley there were swings and sports and a special stall for children, and after tea they returned home on the wagons.

At one time there was a temperance movement connected with the church and Miss Nicholls can remember the Temperance Festival held every Easter Monday. Leader of the movement was Mr. L. Frampton, who lived at the Hoy, Highcliffe. On the festival occasions the church would be packed, said Miss Nicholls, and there were always big congregations every Sunday.

The present Amberwood house was built between 24 and 30 years after the previous house was partly destroyed by fire. Memories of the previous house, occupied for some time by Mrs. Mary Braddyll, are treasured by Mrs. K. E. Withers, of 21, Avenue Road, who was in service there for 13 years. Mrs. Withers started as a kitchen maid and finished up waiting at the table. "We had oil lamps for light and the cooking was done on an old fashioned range with a double oven."

Mrs. Braddyll, who lived until she was 91, used to drive to church at Highcliffe in her carriage driven by the coachman, Mr. Robert Shave. "She was a very gracious lady and always presented the Congregational Sunday school with a huge Christmas tree and the prizes for Sunday school attendance," said Mrs. Withers. And every year she gave the produce from one of her two grape vines to the patients of Christchurch hospital.

PRIMROSES FROM HER STAFF.

On her birthday, which was April 19, Primrose Day, Mrs. Braddyll was always presented with bunches of primroses from her staff and friends. On her 90th birthday she presented four maids including Mrs. Withers, with a bed shawl each, knitted herself during her 90th year.

The Braddylls had a family crest and this, said Mrs. Withers, was on, all the silverware in the house.

The crest included a badger and Mrs. Withers recollects there being a stuffed badger in a glass case, surmounted by the crest, always on a table in the vestibule on entering the house by the front door. The Braddyll family, she said, originally had a family seat. "Conishead Priory", somewhere in the north.

Amberwood was known as the "house of many steps". There were three staircases in the house and several other steps in various parts of the building. "They took a lot of cleaning and we hadn't vacuum cleaners then!" said Mrs. Withers.

The fire at Amberwood occurred after the death of Mrs. Braddyll when the house was unoccupied. "We had been on a Sunday school outing that day and when we returned it was practically over," recalled Mrs. Withers.

Walkford was bombed during the last war and it was during one of those raids that one of the strangest incidents occurred.

A bungalow occupied by an elderly couple was completely destroyed but the couple landed up on the lawn still in their bed and without a scratch!