

CHAPEL HOUSE, BREINTON COMMON

An account, researched by Bronwen Wild, May 2017

Much of the early information about Chapel House comes from a pamphlet written by Harold James Dee, a former resident, in "Historical Notes on Chapel House." He describes Breinton Common, where the house is as "a scattered village delightfully situated on an eminence bordering the River Wye". His source was a booklet by the Rev. E.A. Hughes of Lady Southampton's Chapel, Kenchester. This in turn was reprinted from The Breconshire Presbytery Year Book, 1942. A further source of information was the County Directory of Herefordshire 1858 which tells us that "here (in Breinton Common) is a chapel and school endowed by Lady Southampton, the latter of which is applied to the education of 42 children and is conducted by Mr. Thomas Pugh". The house itself was built in 1830, the last year of the reign of George IV.

Lady Southampton was the daughter of Lord Robert Seymour of Carmarthenshire and married George Ferdinand Fitzroy, 2nd Baron Southampton in 1802. After she was widowed in 1810 she fell under the influence of the non-conformist, evangelical movement of the day. The Home Missionary Society supplied itinerant preachers to country villages. One such was Charles Bartlett who visited Kenchester when Lady Southampton lived at The Weir. She was baptised by immersion in Bristol and through Charles Bartlett promised a £100 to the Home Missionary Society. She also provided Bartlett with a home, Wall Bank, at Kenchester where a chapel and school room were later added. In 1829 she turned her attention to Breinton, enlarging her Trust to provide and endow a Chapel and School room with adjoining school masters house. The minister at Kenchester would serve both chapels.

A certain William Waring had erected a dwelling house in April 1830 on orchard land owned by him. By May it was *this* house that Lady Southampton bought from him for £205. A new Trust deed was created in June for a charity, part religious, part educational. There were seven trustees including her son-in-law Rev Humphrey Allen (later Canon at Bristol Cathedral). Lady Southampton died in 1838 and her son-in-law was active in the administration of the Trust until he died in 1868. Over this period he acquired additional land south and north-west of the house. The land he acquired in 1852 had belonged to a John Vaughn who in 1813 had given land to the Parish on condition that he and his wife Mary could live out their lives in a cottage they would build on it. When he died his wife Mary released the estate to the Overseers who sold it to one John Preece for £20. He later relinquished it to John Pugh, the school master who taught at the school from 1830 to 1867. The land which the Rev. Allen bought in 1864 belonged to the Deanery of Hereford and when Dean Merryweather died, the Church Commissioners sold it to him for £25.

By 1865 the Trust property at Breinton Common comprised just under two acres with a Georgian building of Chapel, Schoolroom and cottage "*with stables and outhouses built of red brick under a blue slate roof.*"

The school at what is now Chapel House could accommodate 70 children and must have been a happy place, for during the period 1830-1878, (48 years), there were only two school masters. Mr. James Pugh taught there until 1857. He had two daughters, Anna and Julia. Then Mr. Rowlands took his place until 1878 when he was transferred to the boys' school at Kenchester with a salary of £55p.a. The school masters may well have farmed the land acquired by Canon Allen to augment their salaries!

In 1855 the Church School at Lower Breinton was opened and by 1870 the Parish Church of St. Michael's had been restored. There were plans for a mission school to be built on the other side of the lane to Chapel House and it became clear that the need for the Chapel/school had waned. The school was closed in 1878 and the cottage let to Mr. Prosser of Credenhill at £10p.a. rent. He was required to keep the Chapel aired and in good order. Until 1884 services had been held in the Chapel regularly but with the opening of the Mission Hall opposite these ceased and by the end of the 19th century the whole property was let to Mr. John Hendry. He was a nurseryman and florist who carried on his business there, later becoming Parish Clerk. Plans to convert the building first to almshouses and then to a library came to nothing, though a Social Club and Reading Room was later established at the back of the Mission Hall.

After WWI inflation hit the Trust with the Kenchester Minister requiring a larger stipend. The trustees applied to the Charity Commissioners to sell the Chapel and use the income to augment the Trust. They also raised the rent to £20. In 1920 the premises were auctioned and bought by the tenant, Mr Jack Hendry. All the buildings were released for secular use. From 1921-1934 Mr. Hendry continued to run his market garden there, living in the cottage and using the old Chapel/schoolroom for storage.

Mrs. J.W. Strange, author of "Reminiscences of an old Breinton inhabitant," wrote: "*Mr. and Mrs. Hendry lived at Chapel House. He was a horticulturalist. He had greenhouses and grew the most beautiful early double pink and yellow tulips as well as Parma Violets and many other hothouse plants as well. His vegetables were always in perfect condition. I have vivid memories of his cucumber house because I love cucumbers! He would never allow you to go in there and leave the door open for one second because it had to be a certain temperature and humidity. So when you went in to choose your cucumber you were shut in quickly and let out just as smartly!*"

In July, 1934 the property was sold to Mr. W.B. Philpotts, formerly of Sugwas Court Lodge, who carried out extensive alterations and additions. The cottage may have been part let to a tenant who worked in the Nursery garden. The two attached drawings show what the house would have looked like in 1830 and in 1968. The land continued to be used as a market garden. A range of heated greenhouses and cold frames etc. were erected, pigs were reared, bees kept and fruit production was increased. Following the war, Chapel House and Chapel Cottage were modernised and running water was provided by installing an automatic pump from the well as well as a drainage system. Mr. Philpotts died at Chapel House in 1959 and the property was inherited by his two sons and a son-in-law in 1960. Later that year they sold the property to Mr Harold John Dee (he who wrote the pamphlet from which much of this information is taken!). He moved to Breinton Common from a flat at Warham House. During his ownership the property was known as Chapel House and Chapel Cottage. The new owners embarked on renovation and modernising, including returning the land to its original use as pasture and garden. Electricity was connected in 1965. In October 1969 a piece of the land was sold to Mr and Mrs G.T.H. Hammond to build a single storey dwelling with garage. Harold Dee died in 1970 and probate was granted to his widow Edna. In 1971 she sold the property to Mr. Ray Norton and Mrs Lindesay Norton. During this ownership the property was knocked through to create one dwelling and was extended during 1983/4. In 1992 planning permission was granted to the Nortons to build on land above Chapel House. This is where they currently live in a bungalow called "Hobart" (The Hammond's bungalow is just above.) In 1994 the property, minus the land above, was

conveyed from the Nortons to Mr John Richard Courtney and Mrs. Patricia Rosemary Courtney. Later, Mr. John Courtney built a house on land to the South of Chapel House, Chapel Croft, and moved there to live with his wife. The house was sold to Mr. Roger Hubbard and Mrs. Vicky Hubbard who live there to this day in 2017.

Ministers who preached at the Chapel during the 19th century.

1830-183? Joseph Preece (Tenbury)

183?-1852 John Griffiths (South Wales)

1852-1856 John Davies (Pembroke Dock)

1856-64 Mr. Staples (Wiltshire)

1864-78 Thomas Hughes (Hay-on-Wye)

Ernest A. Hughes(Kenchester)

I am grateful to Mr John Courtney for the loan of many of the 20th century conveyance documents relating to this property and from which I have drawn information for the story beyond the time span covered in Mr Harold Dee's pamphlet.

Bronwen Wild, May 2017