

ART. XX.—*Swindale Chapel*. By the Rev. J. WHITESIDE,  
M.A.

*Communicated at Carlisle, June 20th, 1900.*

SWINDALE is a picturesque valley that lies “among our mountain fastnesses concealed.” It is  $4\frac{1}{2}$  miles by road from Shap, but only three “as the crow flies.” There are now only three inhabited houses, with a population of 13; namely, Swindale Head, Truss Gap, and Swindale Foot. Fifty years ago there were 13 inhabited houses, with a population of about 45. Some are now in ruins, others are adapted for farm purposes.

Talebert, with two houses and six residents, and Mosedale Cottage, with its family of five, are usually included in the chapelry, making a total of 24 souls. A large cure! But though Swindale has the dignity of an independent benefice there are no defined boundaries to determine the jurisdiction of its incumbent. In a letter of November 25th, 1871, to the Rev. J. Brunskill, the Diocesan Registrar, Mr. G. G. Mounsey, says that he is not aware of the appropriation of any district to Swindale Chapel. He thinks there has been none. Sometimes townships by common consent, and without any precise division of the ancient parish, have been regarded as ecclesiastical districts. For rating purposes Swindale includes Talebert, Racet, Mosedale, Naddle, and Toathman, but the vicars of Shap have regarded the last four places as being under their supervision.

The chapel is an unpretentious House of Prayer,

A small edifice  
In which the peasantry of these lonely dells  
For worship meet.

It is enclosed by a small yard, which is not licensed

for interments, and annexed to its western wall is the tiny grammar school, probably the smallest educational institution within the British isles. There is an average attendance of three scholars, and the master is "passing rich on *thirty* pounds a year."

A writer in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in 1894, says:—

It is a poor wan little church; damp, thanks to the south-west wind and its rain, and also to the clustering sycamores which do their best to hide it. Ten pews or so, each adapted for about four persons of ordinary breadth, make up its complement. It has no lavish decoration, indeed no decoration at all, except three or four faded coarse little symbolic frescoes on its pallid walls and a meagre beading to the colour wash by the windows. There is an iron stove, the plainest of plain stone fonts and a naked altar. These with the hempen bellrope constitute its moveables. The love that the congregation bear to such a building must be of the profound, the heartfelt kind. There is not an æsthetic touch about the church.

One thinks Ruskin would have painted our plain little sanctuary in kindlier language, and noticed how perfectly it harmonized with its surroundings. To give Swindale "an æsthetic touch" would be to spoil it.

The "hempen bellrope" is a fiction of the writer's brain. The bell is rung from the school by an iron chain. I may note here that just as "The Old Church Clock" describes how the good folks of Seathwaite would wait for Wonderful Walker, so it is the primitive custom at Swindale to wait outside for the priest. On his approach the bell is tinkled by the congregation who are gathered in the school to discuss the politics of the happy dale. Then having robed in the simple vestments, he bids them "ring in," and one by one they enter, a reverent, if small, community. And no one was more welcome, or more regular, in my time than a certain sheep dog, who seemed instinctively to know the reverence due in God's House.

The plate consists of a pewter cup and paten inscribed "Swindale Chapel 1819." It seems likely that before

that date the parishioners would go to Shap for the sacrament.

Considerable sums have been spent in recent years in repair and adornment. In 1855, the chapel was roofed anew. In 1870, the roof was reslated, the wooden ceiling added, and drain cut round the outside, and the pulpit and desk, which had previously been outside the screen, removed. In 1874, a still further restoration was effected; new seats, altar, desk, lectern, font, east window, and other minor additions being introduced. The old oak seats were taken to Crosby Ravensworth, and are now, I believe, in that church. The new ones are not particularly comfortable, and have rather a common modern look.

The chapel was reopened on Thursday, September 17th, 1874. The late Canon Weston, in his sermon, suggested that "this holy shrine was built in Anglo-Norman times." But the preacher himself, when not in the pulpit, must have been sceptical about this later theory, for in a letter written by him to Mr. Brunskill on May 4th, 1870, he says—"It struck me from some of the details that the little building, much as it now stands, might be an erection of the time of Charles I., and if so, all rudeness notwithstanding, it is interesting."

In 1897 the boundary walls were rebuilt, Lord Lonsdale allowing the south fence to be put back a few yards. The internal dimensions of the fabric are:—Length 45 feet, breadth 14 feet 6 inches, height 9 feet 4 inches. Its date is wholly conjectural. Whellan (p. 809), followed by local directories, says that the edifice was erected by the inhabitants in 1749. It is also stated that near the chapel is a school founded by Mr. Baxter in 1703. But the present school has been built on to the chapel, which is therefore prior to 1703, if the school is Baxter's. In that case we must reject 1749. And a document which I shall presently quote proves conclusively that a chapel existed before 1749. I conjecture

therefore that the fabric was only restored in 1749, and that it was founded before 1703.

The chapel has some appearance of being contemporary with Mardale, and it is conceivable that the two chapelries would simultaneously desire an oratory of their own. Mardale, however, as I shall show in another paper, claims to date back to the settlement of the Holme family in the time of King John.

If the tradition were correct that the bell came from the Abbey, we are carried back to 1540. But the bell cannot have been of the Tower peal, nor has it an inscription like those of Kirkby Thore and Newton Reigny, which alone, as yet, can substantiate their claim to possess Abbey bells.

In 1728, when Mardale had successfully petitioned for the rights of burial, Swindale also desired its chapel to be consecrated. This ceremony has never taken place, but a formal consecration has been held to be unnecessary after a long period of years, and the invariable usage of the chapel as such would probably be held conclusive, coupled with the petition duly registered at Carlisle, which bears on the margin the Bishop's seal and signature, with the words *Fiat ut petitur*.

I give the petition below :—

To the Right Rev<sup>d</sup> Father in God John, by divine permission Lord Bishop of Carlisle. The Humble Petition of y<sup>e</sup> Inhabitants of Swindale in y<sup>e</sup> parish of Shapp & County of Westmorland showeth. That for some years last past there has been and now is an House or Oratory built in Swindale aforesaid, which was intended by y<sup>e</sup> Founder thereof for a Chapel for Religious Worship that y<sup>e</sup> said Building or Oratory is very commodious for a Chapel, & is situate at Truss Gap in Swindale aforesaid & wou'd be of very great use service & Benefit to y<sup>e</sup> Inhabitants of Swindale afores<sup>d</sup> and of y<sup>e</sup> adjacent Townships & Houses, viz., Talebert Rawside Tothman Woodnook & Naddal to frequent & resort to to attend Divine Service & Sermons to be preached & perform<sup>d</sup> therein, the said Inhabitants being very numerous & most of y<sup>e</sup> said Townships being distant from y<sup>e</sup> church of Shapp aforesaid three long computed miles & some of them above four miles & y<sup>e</sup> same are

situated in a low & watery Country & y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> Roads are very ruinous & bad & y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> same will in all Respects be made decent & commodious for y<sup>e</sup> service of Almighty God & y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> same is endowed with Land to y<sup>e</sup> value of ten pounds per ann<sup>m</sup> or upwards.

May it therefore please y<sup>e</sup> Lordship by Virtue of your Episcopal & pastoral office to separate y<sup>e</sup> said Building from all prophane uses & dedicate y<sup>e</sup> same to y<sup>e</sup> Honour & worship of Almighty God & assign it to be perpetually a Chapel for the Inhabitants of Swindale aforesaid & that it may be used as an oratory for y<sup>e</sup> performance of Divine Service therein until your Lordship shall have Leisure & opportunity to consecrate y<sup>e</sup> same & to do & perform whatever else to your Lordship in that Behalf appertains.

The rough road that comes down to the stepping stones from the south of Talebert Head is called Kirk Gate. If this name were found in ancient deeds or maps it might help to solve the chapel's date. But it might be the gate to Shap Church for funerals from Mardale and Swindale.

The feature that will most attract the attention of antiquaries and experts is the little painted window. We owe the possession of it to the vigilant eye of the Rev. Joseph Brunskill, now rector of Ormshed, and to the carelessness of its former owners. About 1870, when the effects of Mr. Hogarth, solicitor, of Clifton, had been sold, one evening, Mr. Brunskill noticed some glass lying loose in a barn among discarded rubbish. Detecting its value, and the Clifton wardens declining its care, he gathered up the fragments, had them cleaned and repaired at a cost of 20s., and then he filled in the window here.

What terrible deeds are committed under the specious title of Church Restoration! This sacred glass had been removed, it is supposed, from the east end of Clifton Church by William Brougham, the second Lord, who inserted a new decorated window and "restored" the chancel. Nicolson and Burn (vol. 3, p. 417, 1777) say:—"At the east end of (Clifton) chancel are 3 little windows. In the middle window is a crucifix. In one of the other is the portrait of a woman in a posture of devotion, and underneath are the said arms (of the Engaines) and

writ above Helynor Ingayne. In the third window in Mr. Machel's time (*i.e.*, before the year 1700) was a man leaning his cheek on his right hand and holding a book in his left, and above the arms of Fallowfield of Great Strickland." This is undoubtedly our Swindale glass. The manor of Clifton was given by Sir Hugh de Morville, 1154, to Gilbert Engaine and his heirs, *temp.* Henry II. : the last of the name in the direct line had an only child, Eleanor, who married William de Wybergh, 38 Ed. III. She was living in 4 Ric. II., and we may therefore date our window about 1400. A window in the north aisle of Clifton Church bears her arms and effigy.

From the year 1730 to the present day I have traced the following list of readers, curates, incumbents, and priests-in-charge. The date is usually of the license or ordination :—

- 1730, August 12th.—William Stephenson, deacon, licensed to the office "Praelectoris sive Curati in Oratorio de Swindale," or in any other parish outside.
- 1735, December 22nd.—Thomas Birkett, clerk, licensed on the nomination of William Whithead, Edmund Atkinson, and Thomas Baxter, asserted trustees. This T. Baxter was the founder of the school.
- 1735, September 26th.—John Jameson, clerk, licensed on the nomination of the Feoffees.
- 1739, December 24th.—Thomas Willan, clerk, licensed on the nomination of Thomas Fell, Edmund Atkinson, William Whitehead, Richard Jackson, John Ritson, and Thomas Baxter, trustees.
- 1742, October 14th.—John Lancaster, literate, was nominated to be Reader by the Feoffees.
- 1750, June 11th.—Henry Harrison, literate, having been ordained deacon on the previous day, was admitted on the nomination of the "Trustees or disposers" of the said chapelry. He resigned on March 13th, 1752, for "several weighty reasons and considerations," and the curacy was declared void by the bishop on April 17th following.

- 1754, June 9th.—Robert Powley, literate, was ordained deacon and ordained.
- 1757, June 26th.—William Windus, literate, was ordained deacon and licensed. He took a marriage at Shap, September 15th, 1757.
- 1761, July 5th.—Richard Muckell, literate, ordained deacon and licensed to be perpetual curate on the nomination of William Langhorne, vicar of Shap. He was also admitted to be master of the Swindale Grammar School on the nomination of William Fell, Leonard Whitesmith, and William Wilkinson, trustees. I take it that during the 150 years when there were no vicars of Shap, up to 1756, certain irregular sequestrators, who were also trustees of the school, would appoint the curate. Henceforth, the vicar of Shap alone is patron at each vacancy.
- 1762, September 12th.—John Pairington, literate, ordained deacon, becomes perpetual curate. In the Shap Registers are entries of Parrington,
- 1763, September 4th.—William Nicholson, literate, was ordained deacon and licensed.
- 1766, September 14th.—Thomas Thwaites, literate, was ordained deacon and licensed.
- 1767, September 20th.—Thomas Hudson, literate, was ordained deacon and licensed.
- 1771, August 18th.—Edmund Langhorn, literate, was ordained deacon and licensed. In the Shap Register is recorded the baptism of Edward, son of Edmund, curate of Swindale, and Jane Langhorne, on January 19th, 1775.
- 1777, August 31st.—William Tyson was ordained deacon and licensed on the nomination of James Holme, vicar of Shap.
- 1781, July 29th.—Richard Kilvington, literate, was ordained deacon and licensed.
- 1783, July 27th.—James Potter was ordained deacon and licensed.

- 1797, June 18th.—John Robinson, literate, was ordained deacon and licensed, with a stipend of £25. He was ordained priest June 24th, 1798, and on October 16th, 1798, the bishop accepted his resignation.
- 1798, October 16th.—William Robinson, literate, was ordained deacon and licensed to be assistant curate, with the emoluments heretofore paid to assistant curates. He was ordained priest and licensed as perpetual curate on May 19th, 1799.
- 1801, June 14th.—James Cooper, clerk, ordained priest and licensed. He was brother of Robert of Hegdale, the lower house, which is now uninhabited. He taught the school at Swindale, and had been one of Boustead's pupils. He died at Leyland, and left Cooper's Charity to Shap.
- 1815, January 27th.—Robert Walker, clerk, licensed.
- 1833, November 11th.—Stephen Walker, clerk, who had been licensed as curate on March 15th, 1816, to assist Robert Walker, became perpetual curate on the nomination of John Rowlandson, vicar of Shap. He was interred at Shap on March 18th, 1850, aged 71 years. His baptism is entered at Shap, on August 1st, 1779, as son of Richard of Talebert, husbandman, and Agnes his wife.
- 1850, June 15th.—Thomas Sewell, clerk, was nominated by the vicar of Shap, as true and undoubted patron. He was interred at Shap, having died on February 20th, 1870, aged 73 years.
- 1870, April 13th.—Joseph Brunskill, St. Bees, was licensed. He is now rector of Ormshed, and was then master of Lowther Grammar School, with a license of non-residence. Indeed, residence at Swindale was not possible. The vicarage is a cowbyre! He became vicar of Plumpton in 1872, and the duty was taken by the vicar of Shap until 1874.
- 1874, April 15th.—William Henry Bradley, M.A., of Exeter College, Oxford, was licensed. In 1876 he

became rector of Kingsland, Herefordshire, and is now rector of Elsdon, Northumberland. He resided in Shap, and it is unlikely that there will ever be another incumbent. From 1876 the duty is taken by the vicar of Shap, whose patronage, *pro tem.*, has lapsed to the bishop and from the bishop to the Crown.

1876-1893.—Stephen Whiteside, M.A., vicar of Shap.

1893-1896.—George Edward Foden Day, vicar of Bampton.

1896-1900.—Joseph Whiteside, M.A., vicar of Shap.

1901- .—James Makin Collinson, vicar of Shap.

As there was a constant succession of newly-ordained deacons, and there is rarely mention of priests in the Bishop's Registers, most of the early ministers must have been only curates-in-charge. Bampton Grammar School turned out in its famous days—under Langhorne and Boustead—hundreds of clergy, who conveniently served their apprenticeship at Mardale and Swindale, and then migrated to larger spheres.

The Holy Communion might be administered occasionally by the vicar of Shap, and at greater festivals the people, headed by their minister, came to the mother church. Some of the curates were also the schoolmasters, and it is supposed that the chapel, as at Shap, was sometimes used as a school. I was told that 50 years ago the flags inside the screen had been much worn by the clogs of many generations of scholars, and that the holy table, which is now, I think, the credence, was used as the master's writing-desk. But the dalesmen have no such recollection.

Stephen Walker, descended from an old Talebert family, whose abode, the first as you come from Shap, is no longer fit for habitation, is still well remembered by old Swindalians. This house at the beginning of the century produced three brothers, and educated them at Cambridge for holy orders.

In Stephen's time a dispute arose at the chapel whether it was really Sunday. "The Parson's reet: gang on," said old John Fell. On another occasion the bottle of wine being accidentally broken by Schoolmaster Yarker, rum was used instead. No irreverence was intended, or I would not chronicle what gives us an idea of the primitiveness of the dale.

The old parsonage being dilapidated, Mr. Walker lived from house to house. He carried with him a box of sermons, and commonly took one of the top for each Sunday as it came. Old Mrs. Sewell, of Swindale Head, remonstrated, and exhorted him to "Stir up that box: they're beginning to come varra thick."

Thomas Sewell was one of a band of famous brothers, William being incumbent of Troutbeck. He had been curate of Newton Reigny in the twenties. I have an early recollection of his courteous manner, and homely Westmorland speech. He was a kind and genial man. His talk was much of foxes, and he had a long memory of days spent among the crags. Physically, he was large and tall, with mighty limbs, that had carried this "running hunter" when no dalesman could follow "Priest Sewell." Old Dick Rawes, of Talebert, described him to me most accurately as a "tall, good-looking, square-shouldered, long-legged, big-striding man." Rawes lamented the smaller stature and physique of to-day: long ago both men and women were "girt whacking lounging fellows;" now "the lasses were poor bit creatures up to 7 or 8 stone," three of them equal to one former woman. To be "ower kin bred" was as bad for people as for stock.

Once Bishop Villiers at a confirmation at Lowther, making merry over the postal difficulties of Swindale and Mr. Sewell's patient endurance of them, asked him in the vestry why he had not answered his lordship's letter of three weeks earlier. Mr. Sewell calmly replied that "it would be coming to him some day."

There is an entry in the Shap Register:—"Thomas Sewell, son of James of Swindale, yeoman, and Margaret his wife, late Whitesmith, born April the 8th. Baptised the 9th, 1796."

Lest it should seem unkind to print stories of old priests, I would add that the names of Walker and Sewell are still household words. With all their faults, they were in many respects grand old dale priests, in full sympathy with their neighbours.

The one great man of Swindale is John Hodgson, the famous historian of Northumberland, born here November 4th, 1780, and baptised November 13th. He was the son of Isaac of Swindale, stonemason, and Elizabeth his wife, late Rawes. They afterwards moved to Rosgill. The Hodgsons were an old local family, and according to the custom one of the sons received a good education for holy orders. John, the eldest of seven sons and four daughters, was at Bampton School from seven to nineteen years of age, where he was well grounded in classics, mathematics, chemistry, botany, geology, and acquired an interest in natural history and local antiquities through his free rambles in the country. His parents were too poor to send him to the University, and so he became master of Matterdale, with a stipend of £11 per annum (see my paper in this volume of *Transactions*), and subsequently of Stainton, near Penrith. For a full record of his life and labours see Atkinson's *Worthies of Westmorland*, Raine's *Memoir*, and the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

As Rosgill, in Shap, has claimed the honour of his birthplace, I may add that Hodgson himself, in his account of Westmorland in *Beauties of England and Wales*, confirms the Shap Register by saying that he was born at Swindale, and not at Rosgill Head. His ancestors were of Rosgill Head, and after his birth his parents removed thither, where his brothers and sisters were all born.

He died June 12th, 1845, and was buried at Hartburn, in Northumberland.

There are no documents of any kind at Swindale, or in the possession of the vicar of Shap. The Rev. S. Whiteside had seen in Mr. Sewell's time a *Terrier*, but in 1878, when enquiry was made, neither Mr. Brunskill nor any one in the chapelry knew anything of it.

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