

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE LITTLE RUSTIC CHAPEL OF NETHER-MIDHOPE

THE MEDIAEVAL FOUNDATION:

The earliest known records of Midhope reach back to the reigns of King Henry III and Richard I, for there was a charter of agreement dated 1227, between John de Midhope and Hyldenus Waldershelf. Midhope mill was then in existence.

From John de Midhope the manor descended to Elias, son of Robert Blake, who died in 1337 and then the estate moved to Thomas de Barnby. The manorial hall was standing when Barnby's owned the manor, and according to tradition, the first chapel at Midhope formed part of the manorial hall. It was said that this chapel stood on the South side and that around 1360 the Barnby's turned it into a granary. At this point, they built the basic structure of the present chapel. This fabric is of great age; and of the restoration effected in 1705 by Godfrey Bosville, we are told that he not only rescued it from absolute ruin, but happily conserved much of its ancient character.

In times long ago the church must have had very much the character of a shepherds' chapel. It is pleasant to stand outside the chapel on a fine October afternoon and imagine oneself back on a fine afternoon in the fifteenth century. In October the flocks were brought down from the formidable edges of the peat moors to winter on the more sheltered lands near the settlement. All the water troughs would have been carefully cleaned out so that the water will be fresh and clear for the sheep. One can hear the sheep arriving from a long way off, beyond the brow of the hill; the bleating of the ewes, the crying of the lambs and the scolding bark of the dogs. The shepherds call out at the top of their voices to the dogs, which seem intoxicated by the sharp tang of the air and the wild odour of the hills. In the days that follow, the shepherds will come to the chapel, crook in hand, and doffing their hats: happy men, extremely thankful to be once again near help and amongst company for the Winter months.

THE ANTIQUE PULPIT:

The loveliest and most valuable part of the furnishing of Midhope Church is the pulpit. This is a charming piece of craftsmanship dating from the English Renaissance period, 1590 - 1640. The craftsman must have spent many weeks of devoted labour on its panels. It looks as if the inspiration of his design was Elizabethan or Jacobean needlework which had, in its turn, been influenced by tapestries and carpets imported by Elizabethan sailors from the Levant. It is the kind of pattern one might expect to see at Haddon or Hardwick Halls. Midhope pulpit has a delightful lightness and delicacy lacking in later pulpits; and must have one of the best views in the country! A record of one of the earliest sermons preached in it occurs in the diary of Adam Eyre of Hazlehead Hall: "May 26th. 1647 - This morn I went on foot to Midop Chapell, where Mr Shirt preached, and after sermon, wherein hee declared the reasons of our loving God, and God's mercyes in Christ to us, I came home again."

THE RESTORATION WORK OF QUEEN ANNE'S REIGN:

Godfrey Bosville of Gunthwaite Hall bought the Manor of Midhope from Henry Hall of Stumperlow for £2,256 in 1690. In 1705 he served as High Sheriff for the county. Take a look at the engraved stone over the doorway of this Midhope Chapel, and we find the initials and date - G.B.B. over 1705. The side initials are his own and the other B stands for his wife, Bridgot.

He built the little porch entrance, above which can be seen the Bosville coat of arms, and he closeted and paved the chapel. (Closets meaning the high-backed pews with hinged doors to close once the worshipper was inside.)

Six pews on the South were for the tenants of Godfrey Bosville, and the large square pew, now used by the choir, was the Squire's pew. The eight pews on the North side were for the Freeholder's seats, of whom John Wilson of Broomhead Hall, who lived 1672-1735 was one. Another pew has "Sarah Wainwright 1827" painted at the back.

The pulpit and pews are made of oak grown in the vicinity; hinges and catches on the doors were also fabricated from iron made of local ore; the original windows would be of Bolsterstone glass.

The gallery or loft in this rustic chapel was also the work of Godfrey Bosville. The old benches in the gallery were used downstairs in the earlier chapel.

All of us feel that creative work is something of an adventure and when one notices the outward leaning walls of Midhope Church it is not difficult to feel the warm humanity of the craftsmen of 1705. They had more adventure on their hands than they wanted when they took the plunge with one of their ideas. When they put in the gallery for Mr Bosville, they took a great gamble and cut out the tie-beams of the timber-framed building. It began to spread in an alarming way and measures had to be taken to avert disaster. Hence the rather clumsy double collar beams up by the roof and the two buttresses outside the North wall. The useful little porch also does service as a buttress on the South side.

"Justice Bosville", as he was called, was an energetic, forceful, kindly and cultured squire who left a deep impression on the local area. Up to 1847, the services at Midhope were usually conducted by the clergymen from Bolsterstone, then in the Parish of Bradfield. One of them, the Revd. Hooke in the early eighteenth century, has been remembered because in his prayer before the sermon, he used to say: "But especially Let us pray for Godfrey Bosville Esq., and his good Lady."

THE CHURCHYARD:

In the graveyard there are no stones older than 1700, Here is a verse befitting the homely Midhope folk:-

Here sleep together as they lived,
The old folks of the hill,
The homely neighbours of the lane,
In death are neighbours still.

MIDHOPE SCHOOL:

The first day school was erected at Midhope in 1732 and was in use until 1826. The second day school, which was known as the "Subscription" school was to be a great boon to the children of the township. This "Free School" was for instruction in reading, writing and arithmetic of eight poor children, whose parents "shall be or shall have been inhabitants of the township of Midhope, and not dissenting from the Communion of the Established Church".

THE ST. JAMES' & POTTER'S WELLS:

St. James' well stood within the precincts of the manorial homestead. This well may have been held in superstitious reverence long before the Anglo-Saxon, Dane or Norman came on the scene. The mediaeval Christians of Midhope made St. James the Less, patron saint of their chapel, the tutelary saint for the well's safe-keeping. Historically, all life hereabouts depended on springs like this. During the procession at Rogation-tide, five weeks after Easter, the mediaeval priest, robed in violet cope, and accompanied by two cantors in starched surplices, would bless the wells at the same time as he blessed the soil.

"Lord, we ask Thy Blessing and Goodwill at this crowning season of the year," intoned the cantors. "And may our wells give forth in their abundance," the people would reply. The priest would then sprinkle Holy Water.

Midhope Potteries came into being in 1720 and a William Gough built the thirteen houses (Pot House Fold) the ovens or kilns, plus the drying sheds etc. He also built the Potter's Well. This well consists of two stone troughs side by side. Why two troughs? - one for drinking water, and the other for domestic use in the potteries.

Although Midhope stands amidst three reservoirs, the residents had no water piped into their homes until the mid "Nineteen-Thirties".