

Langton Matravers, Dorset.

ABOUT ninety-five years ago at Langton Matravers, a large village a few miles from Swanage, in Dorsetshire, there existed a Baptist Church which has long since become extinct.

In the year 1900, or thereabouts, a Baptist Church was opened at Swanage, at the opening of which I was one of the speakers. The local friends who had chiefly been instrumental in securing this new work were Mr. and Mrs. Walter Jenkins, formerly members of Spurgeon's Tabernacle, at this time residing in Swanage.

The town of Swanage was a quiet little spot, for many years identified with stone quarries and having a quaint old main street. In this street stands a house known as "John Wesley's House," for here the Founder of Methodism resided for one night and his name is to-day on the end of the house, attracting the attention of visitors. The character of Swanage has changed and it is now a popular seaside resort, having two Baptist Chapels and rapidly growing residential suburbs.

While staying a few days in the town some years ago I learned something of Langton Matravers. The friend with whom I stayed took me to visit an old resident in this village, who has since passed away. He was a Baptist, and remembered well the old chapel. Mr. Lander was pleased to see a Baptist minister and talk with him about former years.

The first Pastor, so I learned, was a gifted working man, for in addition to his preaching and pastoral duties he composed year by year a Christmas carol which was sung by the villagers on Christmas Day. Fifty years after his decease some of the carols continued to be sung in the Wesleyan Chapel at Langton every Christmas.

In his boyhood days my aged informant had attended the Baptist Sunday School, and confirmed to me a story I already had heard of the chapel. It appears that as soon as the man had dug out the soil in preparation for building the baptistery, water immediately sprung up and filled the vacant space.

Miracles of this sort have been reported of ancient abbeys and cathedrals, but could this be true of a humble Baptist Church? Yes, indeed it was true, and my veteran friend told me that when in the dry season and water ran short, the villagers would go to the baptistery with cans and buckets and find a plentiful supply.

On the occasion of this visit I was introduced to the local baker, Mr. Chinchin, who also was a Baptist. This brother told me of an interesting discovery. While taking down part of an old wall of one of his outhouses, a stone was discovered bearing an inscription which was turned inward. This stone I saw, and the inscription, which was clearly marked, read as follows:—

“ Baptist Church built 1834.”

This gave unquestioned proof that at this early date there was a Baptist Church at Langton Matravers in Dorset.

R. BOYD MORRISON.

THOMAS PLANT, “ who had been a milliner, or seller of hoods, gloves, and smallware,” was heard by Robert Kirk of Aberfoyle early in 1690 preaching at the old play-house in the Barbican, near Cripplegate. He never had been in orders, was now a Baptist minister with a congregation of 200, paid £100 sterling for preaching. “ This Mr. Plant for four days sang psalms, but many of his people forsaking him for it because the scriptures command it not, he desisted from it. . . . He called Saint John, John; Saint Paul, Paul; which Presbyterians and Quakers do not. He was a very corpulent man; had an hour-glass set before him. The Quakers had neither sense, reason, nor sound religion. The Baptists had sense, but no rational coherence nor derivation from the scope and the design of the text.” This Episcopalian Highlander’s diary of his visit to London with the MS. of the Gaelic Bible, is full of such details, from which the Presbyterian Historical Society has printed a few. Plant’s church was the largest and wealthiest; he had built it up for twenty years; but he declined to attend the 1689 Assembly and formally rank as a Calvinist.