

***Chester Chronicle report of 18 April 1874***

NEW CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL AT THREAPWOOD

LAYING THE FOUNDATION STONES

The foundation stones of a new Congregational Chapel at Threapwood were laid on Wednesday. The site of the old chapel has been enlarged, and the new one, though by no means imposing in appearance or as capacious as that at Malpas, will no doubt be amply sufficient for the wants of the neighbourhood. Probably the scattered population does not exceed four hundred souls, and as there are five places of worship within a radius of as many miles, it is not likely that Threapwood will suffer from spiritual destitution. Indeed the chapel which is now being built cannot be considered an addition. There has been a lengthening of the ropes and a strengthening of the stakes, but from a very early period Congregationalism had gained a lodgement in this village. The first place of worship was a brick kiln, or rather a shed near one; then a very modest little chapel was built, and that having become dilapidated and unsafe, a new one was required and hence the ceremony which we have to record. Before building however, the question of ways and means had to be considered. A sum of £250 was needed - not a large one when we consider how prodigal some denominations appear to be in chapel building. The nucleus of a fund was supplied by two grants from building societies - one of £50 from the Lancashire and Cheshire Chapel Building Society, and one of £20 from the London Chapel Building Society - and the very liberal gift of Mr. E. Broad, who promised that he would make his £20 into £50 if the chapel could be opened free from debt. Other sums were promised, and the next thing was to invite tenders for the construction of the chapel. Three were sent in, and that of Mr. Thomas Huxley, of Malpas, was accepted. For a trifle less than £250 he undertook to build a new little Gothic chapel to seat about 150 persons. The dimensions will be 30 feet long, not inclusive of the apsidal termination, and 20 feet wide, and at the north-east corner is a minister's vestry 10 feet by 7 feet. The gabled front, with an entrance porch and two lights, one on each side, will face the west. There will be three double-light windows on each side of the chapel, divided by buttresses, the building being of brick, with stone dressings. The internal fittings will be of red deal, stained and varnished; the seats open, and the minister's desk on a dais within the apse.

The day fixed for the laying of the foundation stones was a most propitious one. It was one of those bright genial spring days which add so much to the enjoyment of open air services in a quiet country village. At three o'clock the time fixed for commencement of the proceedings, there were only two or three persons on the spot, besides the workmen, who have already got in the foundations, but presently young men and maidens, and their elders, came trooping in from all sides, and formed what may be regarded as a large congregation. The hymn, "This stone to Thee in faith we lay", was sung, and the Rev. J.L. Jones, the pastor at Malpas, who has also the oversight of the church at Threapwood, then read the 1st Chronicles, chap. xxix., and offered prayer. After that the mallet and silver trowel were presented to Mr. Richard Jones, of Chester, by Mr. Thomas Huxley, in the absence of the Rev. R.W. Lloyd through indisposition. The trowel bore the inscription - "Presented to Richard Jones, Esq., on the occasion on his laying the foundation stone of the new Congregational Chapel at Threapwood, 15th April 1874."

Mr. JONES, having laid the stone in the usual way spoke a few words then placed £10 upon it.

Several other stones were laid, and the following sums were given:- Mr. John Roberts, £5; Mrs. John Roberts, £2; Mrs. Edward Broad, £3; Mr. Broad, Chorlton Hall, £1; Mrs. Broad, £1; Mr. Evans, Halghton Mills, £1; and Mr. Brassey,

The Rev. T. ROBINSON, B.A., of Hyde, then delivered the dedicatory address. He said, in rearing this new chapel, our friends (*There is a report here of Mr. Robinson's mixture of sermon and address: as was customary, part of it alluded to the particular doctrinal and organisational position of Congregationalists, part of it can be seen as a 'normal' evangelical appeal. Part of it, in keeping with such denominationalism of the times, objected to "the first stealthy introduction of foolish ceremonies ... Beware of the word 'priest' ... Beware of what are called Catholic principles but which, in reality, are the principles of schism and sectarianism ... It is the duty of all true Protestants, whether they*

*belong to the Established Church or to dissent, to vindicate their Protestantism, and to set their face against even the appearance of Popery”).*

The hymn, “Jesus, where’er thy [*mis-written as ‘they’*] people meet,” was then sung, and was followed by the Benediction.

The company then repaired to a field a short distance off, where a tent had been erected, and was speedily filled by tea drinkers. There was an abundance of provisions; the tea having been got up by Mr. E. Broad, of the Holy Land. Our readers, who know nothing about Threapwood, must not make a mistake. The Holy Land is the sign of a public-house, and the artist who painted the sign, attempted to delineate the grapes of Eschol, a bunch of which are borne by two individuals whose costume, whatever it once was, is now very doubtful. But, singular as this sign is, it is certain that the landlord is well disposed towards the little Bethel in the vicinity, and perhaps it would be better for the character of many of his brethren in the trade if they showed a readier disposition to assist at tea drinkings. In this instance, Mr. Broad would lose nothing, as the caterer for the tea party, and certainly stand higher in the estimation even of those who did not patronize his house to partake of the cup which both cheers and inebriates. No doubt all were glad to avail themselves of the provision he made for man and beast. Probably about three hundred partook of tea, and afterwards a short public meeting was held. The meeting was presided over by the Rev J.L. Jones, and was commenced by the singing of the hymn, “All hail the power of Jesus’ name,” to the old tune Miles’s Lane, and prayer.

The CHAIRMAN said he was sure that all of them would rejoice in the prosperity of that day. He rejoiced to find that there was such kind feeling shown on all sides, and such an absence of everything like bigotry. He assured them that while he was strongly attached to his Congregational principles, his object was to preach Christ and him crucified [Hear, hear]. In compliance with a promise he had made, he then proceeded to give a financial statement. There was promised before commencing their exertions in connection with the tea meeting about £200. The builder’s contract was £230, but with extras and the land would probably be £250. Towards the £50, there had been £24 contributed at the stone laying, and there would be the tea meeting and collection, which he thought would yield all the money they required. If they got more than was actually needed for the chapel, it would be for them to consider whether they should erect a schoolroom, for some had expressed an objection against the chapel being used as such. The chairman read out a list of the subscribers to the chapel fund, which included Mr. R Roberts, Chorlton, £10; Mr. John Roberts, £5; Mr. John Broad, £3; Rev J.L. Jones, £3; Mr. Thos. Evans, Sarn, £2; Mr. John Shone, £2; and several sums of £1. He also read a long list of those who had furnished, or partly furnished, the tea tables.

The Rev F.B. Brown, of Wrexham, then addressed the meeting. He said he had come to rejoice with them. (*There is a report here of Mr. Brown’s speech-cum-sermon, partly about his contact with Threapwood, partly an exposition of the Biblical use of the imagery of foundations and stones, partly an encouragement to the people of Threapwood despite their small beginnings*).

... May God, he added in closing, give you great results, and crown this laying of the foundation stones with his abundant blessing in a large and prosperous Christian church.

The Rev. T. ROBINSON of Hyde then addressed the meeting, urging the importance of the Christian churches observing the apostolic precept, “Owe no man anything.” He said it seemed to be the prevailing opinion that while it was altogether a wrong thing for a man to get into debt or exceed his income, it was altogether the right thing for a Christian church to incur a debt and exceed its income or its apparent means of paying a debt. He gave illustrations of this, and afterwards dwelt on the necessity for people bearing witness in their lives to the truths taught by the minister from the pulpit.

A collection was then made, £1. 14s. 8d. being realised, and the hymn, “There is a fountain filled with blood” was sung, followed by the Benediction, and so ended the simple yet interesting proceedings of the day.

*Additional notes:*

1. I think that the Lancashire and Cheshire Chapel Building Society and the London Chapel Building Society were “Chapel Building” societies rather than “Building Societies” as we have come to understand the term.
2. The list of participants suggests quite a strong link between Chester Congregationalism and the Malpas/Threapwood area.

3. The Secretary of the Cheshire Union of Congregational Churches will have been present for a variety of reasons: he was obviously a popular preacher at stonelayings and openings, records showing such activity elsewhere in Cheshire; it was always considered good to have a visiting preacher from somewhere else [frequently] within the borders of one's county [Congregationalism was organised within Counties from the start of the 19th century until 1972]; and the County Union had grant-aided Malpas almost continuously from 1815, and specifically with Threapwood from 1870, until at least into the 20th century.

*Dramatis Personae:*

- Mr. Thomas Huxley: of Malpas Congregational Church where he was variously deacon, treasurer, School Superintendent, lay preacher, and almost certainly held other offices too. Very active, including Chairman in 1900, in the Cheshire Union of Congregational Churches
- Rev. J.L. Jones: Congregational minister at Malpas Congregational 1870 to 1875: almost certainly **NOT** the Rev J.L. Jones who in 1902 moved from Abersychan, Monmouthshire to Great Boughton, Chester.
- Mr. Richard Jones: of Great Boughton, Chester [see below], where he was a founding layman in 1867, serving as deacon and treasurer.
- Rev. R.W. Lloyd : from Wollerton, Shropshire [1868 chapel built by Thomas Huxley] to Great Boughton, Chester [Christleton Road just east of junction with Tarvin Road: now closed but building still there] in July 1871 until his death in 1881.
- Rev T Robinson BA of Hyde: Secretary of the Cheshire Union of Congregational Churches from 1871 until 1885, being minister at Union Street, Hyde from 1864 to 1885.
- Mr. John Shone: The surname Shone was still in prominent evidence at Malpas Congregational until the building of the 1995 High Street Church [Methodist/United Reformed]. Any connection with the family of the 1874 donor is entirely speculative.