

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST
in **COCKEY** otherwise **AINSWORTH**



A History

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K. P. BULLOCK,
Vicar of Ainsworth

Easter, 1970

A History of Ainsworth Parish Church

(otherwise known as Cockey Chapel)

The origin of the name ‘Cockey Moor’ or ‘Cokkamore’ is possibly connected with the Celtic word ‘cock’ meaning ‘red earth’. A former Vicar of Ainsworth, the Rev. J. A. Lauria, makes this suggestion, saying, “The origin of the name is obvious. Anyone following the line of the old Roman road partly identical with the upper or Bury Old Road (now Cockey Moor Road) will find especially in the North West district a remarkable red earth. In digging their road the ancient Romans, or whoever it was, must have turned up this red earth, and been much struck with it, hence the name.” It may be that the Romans took over the old Celtic name, Kokka, and added the last syllable to give the name Coccium, because it has been suggested that Cockey Moor was the Roman station of that name.

The Elizabethan writer, William Camden, wrote, in 1586, “As I was seeking eagerly near the Irwell for Coccium, mentioned by Antoninus, I saw Cockley (Cockey) a wooden chapel set round with trees.” Saxton’s map of 1577, shows Cockley Chapel, but makes no mention of Coccium. Later cartographers of the seventeenth century record the two places as being the same, but this may possibly be based on Camden’s words, since others would claim that Wigan is the Coccium of the Romans. However, it would seem that there is as much evidence, or lack of it, for Cockey Moor being Coccium as there is for Wigan. It is certainly true that the Roman road runs past the edge of Cockey Moor, and that in 1774 some Roman urns containing bones were discovered at Brightmet Hill, so that a settlement of some sort would seem to be implied.

Cockey Moor was in the townships of Ainsworth and Radcliffe, but it is equally difficult to find the meaning of the name, “Ainsworth”. It has been suggested that ‘worth’ means a fenced field or farm, and that the first syllable ‘ains’ comes from the old German word ‘ano’, an ancestor, which is similar to the Celtic word ‘hin’, old, so that the meaning, according to this, could be “land or farm from ancestors.” An alternative suggestion is that ‘ains’ may have been corrupted from the personal name ‘Einulf’ or ‘Eginulf’.

The Early History of the Church

The origins of the Church in Ainsworth are also rather obscure. In an early eighteenth century list of churches in Manchester Deanery, there is the reference, “Cockey, very ancient”. Certainly the Chapel existed in pre-Reformation times, probably going back into the 1400’s. The earliest mention of Ainsworth Church, anciently known as “Cockey Chapel”, is in an old document which was found in the Muniment Room of the old Middleton Hall. This records a dispute between the Lords of the Manors of Radcliffe and Middleton. Richard Assheton prosecuted Robert Aynsworth for trespassing on grounds at “Cokkamore”. This was in 1514 or 1515. Among the witnesses was one of the priests of “Medilton”, Sir Olvy Issherwode, who did “depose testifye record” that he had been thirty-seven years priest in the parish of Middleton, and had heard the confessions of “the crystyn pepull of the Hamell of Aynsworth.” Another witness, William Mandevell, who describes himself as a “proctor of Medelton”, records “I have reseyuid all manner of dues & ptenyng to Anysworth & Cokkeymore in the pishe Church of Radcliff tyll the vareans was betweee Mr. Assheton of Medilton & Mr. Radcliff of Radcliff and syne then at the Chapell of Cockey more.”

Parish Boundaries

How Ainsworth came to be in the parish of Middleton is not known, except that the Lords of the Manor owned land in these parts. In a letter dated 1866 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, the church is referred to as an Ancient Chapelry, and was probably a Chantry Chapel built by the Lords of the Manor of Middleton for the use of their tenants at Ainsworth. Between 1190 and 1216, there was a grant of land made by Roger de Middleton “to God (and the canons of Cockersands)” of a portion of his land at Ainsworth “within these bounds, to wit, where Moorbrook runs from the deep moss unto Mucklebrook (? Middlebrook) thence going round by that brook unto the syke which comes down from Balshaw, thence ascending that syke unto the deep moss.” It is rather interesting that this would seem to be about the same boundary as the present parish boundaries, which stretch from the brook on the moor at Slack’o’th’Moor to the brook at Middle Brook bridge, known locally as Red Bridge. It would be pure conjecture to suggest that the Abbot of Cockersands Abbey would provide a chapelry, and there is no evidence of this, but it is, I think, rather significant that the parish boundaries and the boundaries of the land grant should be similar.

All that can be said then, by way of origins, is that Ainsworth Church, or Cockey Chapel, is an ancient chapelry, which was in existence in 1515, and probably for many years prior to that. It was in the diocese of Lichfield and served a large area, the nearest churches being the Parish Churches of Bury, Bolton and Radcliffe.

The Church Building

Cockey Moor of those days was surrounded by extensive woodlands and the chapel would probably be a half-timbered building of the style commonly known as Tudor. An inventory of 1552 shows in the possession of the chapel "One vestment with albe amesse for the same one chalece with paten of syler a littell bell." The people who would attend worship bore names which are still with us today. Among the witnesses in the court case of 1515 mentioned earlier were George Kirkman, Amys Crompton, Edmund Greenhalgh, Lawrence Lomax, James Opynshaw and Elys Bothe.

The wooden chapel was replaced by a stone building, which forms the nave of the present church. The date of this stone building is not known but would seem to be about two or three hundred years old. In 1831, it was partly rebuilt and enlarged by the addition of a short chancel, the tower and the galleries, which went round three sides of the church, and in 1842, a transept, which now houses the organ, was built into the north wall to provide extra accommodation. The proprietary pews were in the gallery and the singers' pews were located in the tower portion of the gallery, although later, the singers were brought down into the main body of the church. Downstairs the seating consisted of box-pews, which were arranged in three blocks, one being in the centre of the church, with two aisles. These were replaced by the present pews at the beginning of the present century when the church was re-floored, and the organ, which was installed in 1908, was placed in the north transept. At the same time, a reredos containing panels with the Creed, Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments on them, was erected above the altar, covering the lower part of the sanctuary windows. This is why only the upper parts of these windows have stained glass in them. The font was also replaced by the present one, which is of no great beauty.

What is now the choir vestry was originally a private pew and when repairs were carried out recently to the church, the east end was rebuilt and the choir vestry extended. The reredos was taken down from the east windows and used as a dividing wall between the choir vestry and the sanctuary. The altar rail was extended in an L-shaped design to provide more kneeling space for communicants. At the same time, the side galleries were removed and the west gallery partly rebuilt. Extensive repairs were also carried out to the roof, all this being necessitated because of woodworm and dry rot. However, this provided the opportunity for a certain amount of re-designing, while still retaining the line and style of the old interior, which resulted in the chancel being widened and the east end being less cluttered.

Church Furnishings

Some beautiful carving can be seen in the altar, priest's stall, pulpit and lectern. All these came from Bury Old Church, where they had been erected by Canon Hornby. When Bury Parish Church was re-built in the last century, they were bought by Henry Whitehead of Haslam Hey, a local benefactor who also gave the village the Recreation Ground, and brought to Ainsworth Church. In pleasing contrast to the old carving, a fine example of modern craftsmanship can be seen in the Bishop's Chair which was given to the church in 1966. Other recent additions are the altar candlesticks, new carpets for the aisle and sanctuary and a pamphlet stand and table at the west end of the church.

The church plate is of no great antiquity, dating in the main from the last century. The only exception to this is a chalice, the date of which is unknown. The bowl is of silver and was probably an old wine cup, the stem and base of which are missing. At some time it was "married" to a stem and base made of Sheffield plate, which could well be an early example of this type of work. This means that the chalice, which is now used on occasion as a ciborium, could be at least two hundred years old, and probably older.

The Churchyard

In the churchyard, there are several interesting features to be noticed. Just inside the lych gate, which is modern, being erected in 1963, there are two stone stumps. These are the remains of the old village stocks and were originally outside the church gates. The one on the right bears the date 1753.

To the right of the church door is the oldest gravestone that can be traced. It records the death of "Mr. Jonathan Dorning born Decem 8th 1690 died December 20th, 1726." This stone was originally in one of the aisles of the church being removed, with other stones from the aisle, to its present position when the church was re-floored about 1908. The bodies, of course, still remain under the floor of the church. Other gravestones from the early eighteenth century are to be found under the chancel which, at the time, had not been built.

The old font, which was replaced by the present one, also in 1908, has been re-erected in the churchyard on the south side of the church. Just opposite, on the base of the tower, is an ordnance survey mark. The height above sea-level at this point is 555 feet higher than Blackpool Tower.



The Church, showing the old font in the right foreground



The east end of the Church



The north side of the Church



The interior of the Church prior to 1906 from the east end



The interior of the Church between 1906 and the alterations in 1964



The interior of the Church after the repairs and alterations of 1964



The beautiful carving on the altar

The Registers

Church Registers go back to 1727, those between this date and 1812 being deposited in the Lancashire Record Office. It is interesting to note that the grave mentioned above is dated 1726 and no record appears in the earliest register. It would seem, therefore, that previous registers must have been in existence but have been lost. It is said that in former days when some parishioners went to Middleton Church, some nine miles distant, to be married, they were accompanied on their way by a fiddler, whose music no doubt served to make the journey seem shorter.

Church Life in Ainsworth

The history of Church life in Ainsworth would take us through many phases. The pre-Reformation days when the people went to confession and attended Mass, and then the break with Rome and the later growth, and for a while the dominance of Puritanism. Lancashire went to greater lengths in setting up Presbyterian "Classic" and in hostility to "Prelatism", i.e., Bishops, than most parts of England. Cockey Chapel was dominated through the Stuart and Commonwealth days by Presbyterianism. In 1620, the Chapel had a special curate or Lecturer. In 1640, one of its clergy was ejected because he was "a scandalous and ignorant prelatist whose preaching led to Popery."-in other words he inclined to church rule by bishops and probably refused to take the Covenant. It was a hard, intolerant age and persecution inevitably followed any opposition to or deviation from the views of the dominant party.

After the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, the minister of Cockey Chapel, John Lever or Leaver, was ejected because he refused to conform to the dictates of the Established Church. It would seem, however, that Presbyterianism continued to be preached for some years after this in Cockey Chapel as in the returns made to the Bishop of Chester in 1669, under Middleton, "it is commonly reported that at Cockey Chappell there have been of late times diverse unconfornable ministers who frequently have preached there." Even as late at 1706, Warden Wroe reported to the Bishop that the Chapel was in the hands of dissenters, and in 1718, Bishop Gastrell found that the Rector of Middleton preached here once a month, other Sundays it was vacant, so it would seem that in the years between the Restoration and the beginning of the eighteenth century, services were taken alternately by clergy of the Established Church and nonconformist ministers. There would also appear to have been a Dissenting Meeting House in existence between 1672 and the building of the Presbyterian Chapel. Warden Wroe said in his report that "There is a Meeting House built so near it (Cockey Chapel) that the congregations may hear one another sing psalms."

In 1715, a Dissenting Chapel, referred to as Cockey New Chapel, was built across the road from the original Cockey Chapel. Ten years later, in 1725, the Rev. James Wylde, B.A., was appointed Curate in charge of Cockey Chapel, and the name Christ Church was assigned to the Chapel. It may be that the title was given to avoid confusion with the Cockey New Chapel. When the church was partly pulled down and re-built in 1831, during the incumbency of the Rev. John Haughton, it was re-consecrated, with the title "The Church of Christ in Cockey otherwise Ainsworth." In 1867, it became a separate parish from Middleton. This had been suggested as far back as 1650 by the Commonwealth Commissioners who reported, "And the said Chappell is fit to be made a Parish Church, and all Aynsworth Hamel], which is in Middleton Parish, is fitt to be appropriated unto the said Parish Church of Cockey, as well as Haslam Hey, Brightmet and Harwood." The incumbent of the new parish was given the title of Vicar, the Rector of Middleton being the patron. This patronage was later handed over to the Bishop of Manchester.

Ainsworth in Recent Times

The district which the Parish of Ainsworth serves covers a wide area with a population of between 2,500 and 3,000 people. It contains a Methodist Church which dates back to 1847 and a Unitarian Chapel which was formerly the Presbyterian Chapel. There is a Church Day school, built in 1838, which is due for replacement. Prior to this a school existed in Bradley Fold Road, giving rise to this road being known locally as Schoolside. The locality is one in which dairy farming is predominant, although there are some factories in the Bradley Fold area. Only one exists in the village itself, a former mill which is now used for the manufacture of packing cases. In times past, there was a great deal of bleaching and dyeing in the area, but as far as the village is concerned this is no longer the case. Many of the local people work in Bury, Bolton and Radcliffe. There is the village, a small Corporation housing estate and a number of private dwellings and farms. The parish also includes the Bradley Fold area which was served by St. Oswald's Mission Church. This started as a "tin mission" in Bradley Fold, but a permanent building was erected in 1916 at the corner of Bury New Road and the Radcliffe Moor Road. However, with modern methods of transport, there is not the same need for the mission, and it was closed in 1970.

All in all, Ainsworth is a pleasant place in which to live, having the advantages of village and country life, while being within easy access of the towns. It has had a long and varied history and much more could be said about it than has been written here, but this account is concerned mainly with the history of the Parish Church.

List of Incumbents and Assistant Clergy at Ainsworth Church (Cockey Chapel)

- 1515 First recorded mention of Cockey Chapel. Names of clergy not known until 1600.
- 1600-10 Mr. Hibbert or Hubbert. First minister whose name is known.
- 1615 Mr. Rathband.
- 1641-45 Richard Goodwin (Presbyterian) afterwards Vicar of Bolton. Ejected 1662.
- 1647 Peter Bradshaw (Presbyterian).
- 1653-57 Mr. Taylor.
- 1657-60 Peter Bradshaw (Second appointment).
- 1660 John Lever or Leaver (Presbyterian). Ejected 1662.
- 1662-1725 No regularly appointed minister at the church. Services were held once a month by the Rector of Middleton or one of his curates.
- 1725 Rev. James Wilde, B.A. He signs himself Curate and resided in Radcliffe, but his children were baptised here. He served Cockey and Bradshaw alternate Sundays.
- 1727 Registers begin. There were probably Registers before this date but they have been lost.
- 1759-67 Rev. John Barlow, B.A. (non-resident) signs himself Curate of Cockey and Bradshaw.
- 1768-94 Rev. Robert Dean or Deane, resided at Bolton. Master of the Grammar School there.
- 1794-98 Rev. John Atkinson signs himself Assistant Curate; Second Master at Bolton Grammar School.
- 1799-1827 Rev. John or James Archer, Incumbent, lived at Middleton. He was Master of the Grammar School there. He was also Curate there under Dr. Richard Assheton, Rector of Middleton.

- 1801-16 Rev. Richard Parker. Curate under Mr. Archer. First resident Episcopal minister since Peter Bradshaw (1650).
- Several Assistant Curates followed, resident and non-resident, including the Rev. Philip Wharton (1816) and the Rev. Edward Ellwood (1825). The incumbent, James Archer, was non-resident because there was no parsonage house.
- 1828-36 Rev. John Haughton, son of a Rector of Middleton. First resident Incumbent. During his incumbency the church was partly pulled down and rebuilt, in 1831, and the tower, chancel and galleries were added.
- 1836-50 Rev. Richard Heslop. The tower was partly pulled down and raised 23 feet, the Earl of Wilton contributing £100 to the cost. The schools were built in 1838. Curates were Samuel Moor (1845), William Wheeler (1846-48), and S. Cavan (1848-50).
- 1850-57 Rev. George Ridley Carr. William Haslam and others were Curates.
- 1857-87 Rev. Robert Macdonnell Evanson, M.A. During his incumbency Ainsworth became a separate parish in 1867. Curates were M. Dredge (1878) and G. E. Roberts (1880).
- 1887-1905 Rev. John A. Lauria.
- 1905-31 Rev. Alfred Wood, during whose incumbency the church was re-floored and re-pewed, and St. Oswald's Mission Church was built.
- 1931-62 Rev. Wilfred Metcalfe. Mayor of Radcliffe 1949-50.
- 1963- Rev. Kenneth Poyser Bullock, M.A.



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