

**BRIEF HISTORY OF
BIDDULPH PARISH CHURCH
1918**

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Biddulph folk, whether they pass it on their way to work, or worship there on the Day of Rest, all of them "think a deal" of the Old Church. Their forefathers as children were baptised in its font. Thither they came as men and women to be wed. And when life's work was o'er, there their children reverently laid their bodies by 'till the Master of all good workmen shall set them to work anew.

Where the stately fabric now stands, a church of some sort has stood for 1000 years. At first, but a small oak-built Chantry, later, in Saxon times, probably of stone throughout. (The present arch to belfry is of Saxon type). Later still, as it is now, consisting of excellent ashlar work, built by christian hands as a witness to Christ and dedicated to His service alone.

The present structure is built in early English style, with clerestoried nave, and three aisles, and stands on the site of an ancient Saxon Church destroyed by the Danes c. 850 - 900. It was rebuilt in the twelfth century, the first Rector being a Norman - Odo le Chapelyn 1240. A crusader's helmet and crest, gauntlets and spur, are preserved in the church. In 1223 a cistercian Abbey was founded at Hulton by Henry de Audley and dedicated to St. Mary.

Richard II granted the advowson of Biddulph and an acre of land to the Abbot and monks of Hulton on payment of 25 marks, under his Great Seal, July 1390. (It is possible that the "Black Death" in 1349 had carried off so many clergy and people that this step was desirable, and that the "Weeping Cross" on the South side of the church is a penitential cross of that time, while the five Stone tomb slabs under the South windows, incised with designs of cross, sword and battleaxe, are of a much earlier date).

For 160 years the Abbey of Hulton supplied the clergy of Biddulph and by paying a sum of £66.13.4. to Henry VIII the Abbey survived the dissolution of the Monasteries - for a time ! Nicholas Whelock being appointed the first Vicar at this transition stage, about 1535.

Then the Reformation supervened and there were taken from Biddulph a Romish sacring bell, vestments etc. but a paten and chalice of silver, linen cloths for the Holy Communion, and a surplice for the "Curate" were retained and handed over to the Churchwardens. The first register (now in the vestry) dates from 1558, the first entry being "Edwardus Biddulph". It was written in latin up to 1624 and after this in English. In 1640 William Bowyer, of Knypersley, was buried in the Church, in the existing handsome alabaster table-tomb.

Three years later, Cromwell's soldiers besieged Biddulph Hall and took it. They also smashed the stained glass windows of the church, of which have been preserved and pieced in the present windows. John Bowyer was then Vicar.

There was a "Deprivation" in 1662, and from 1783 to 1810 the eccentric Jonathan Wilson, whose voluminous diary is preserved in the Vicarage, was Vicar.

When in 1824, James Bateman of Tolson Hall, Westmoreland (the late Vicar's great-grandfather) bought the Biddulph and Knypersley estates, he put his only son, John, in possession.

The young squire at once set his mind on rebuilding the tumbled down church. In those days there was no road from Biddulph to Congleton. It turned sharp to the right at the present churchyard corner past the Church House Inn, where the Vicarage now stands, and round by Overton through Dane-in-Shaw. Horses and pedestrians turned 150 yards south of this down a track to the left which led through Marsh Green over Nick o' th' Hill.

The Rev. R. Bateman first set foot in Staffordshire when he dismounted at Knypersley after riding through the 'Nick' from Manchester.

More primitive still was the entry of a new Vicar, who late on a November night, could get no nearer the Vicarage than Red Bull, until he luckily found a man to carry his bags and guide him to the Church House for eighteenpence.

In conjunction with rebuilding the church, Mr John Bateman, therefore arranged for the construction of what is sometimes called the 'New Road' from the Church by the brook side to Dane-in-Shaw, and in 1834 the work of restoration was commenced. The Rev. William Holt was then the Vicar, and for two years wny who wanted to be married went either to Horton or Norton or Congleton. Baptisms were solemnised in the old Vicarage house on the site of Mr R. Heath's residence, the present Biddulph Grange.

In 1836 the church was re-opened, looking, externally, much as we now see it.

In the Chancel, the school boys sat round the Bowyer Altar-tomb, kept in awe and order by Mr Partington, clerk and schoolmaster, whose "wand of authority" lay on the top of the tomb - ready !

The church music was supplied by a sweet-toned barrel organ, with other old fashioned instruments, such as fiddles, flutes etc., the orchestra and the choir being seated in a loft at the West End of the church. The free seats were under this organ loft. For a period of over 25 years the church services were thus conducted.

In 1866 the churchyard was enlarged and in 1872 the tower was partially destroyed by fire and was rebuilt, and a new organ obtained by public subscription amounting to £267. Since then and up to the present year, there have been many additions and improvements - gifts of church furniture, gas fittings, a peal of six bells, a clock, heating apparatus, additional churchyard-ground etc. Many, if not all of these good works, were most liberally subscribed to by the late Robert Heath and his family and it was in his memory that the church was re-seated in oak by the present squire and his brothers, Sir James and Col. A.H. Heath in 1894.

The Parish however, has always showed by the subscriptions raised it's own interest in the old church, and the help that the Vicar and his fellow workers received from the Parishioners in the organisation of the Empire Bazaar, shows that the old pride in the old church is still at the old level.

The organ in this church has been dedicated to the Glory of God and in loving memory of his faithful ministry, by the Parishioners and his own family.

He loved this house of God and devoted himself unsparingly to its restoration and preservation. In accordance with his earnest wish, his body lies within its shadow and among the people he loved and for whom he worked.

A bed has also been endowed by relatives and friends to his memory in Rannu Hospital, N.W. India, where he baptized the first converts to Christianity from that district. "Faithfull in all His House".

The family and friends of Mr Bateman have under consideration the question of erecting a Tablet in the church; this has been delayed through the War and the illness of Mr Robert Bateman.

The following dates will convey some idea of the church's history since the re-opening in 1836:

- 1836 Churchyard enlarged by gift of James Bateman Esq.
- 1872 Tower repaired after fire and new organ obtained by public subscriptions of £267.7.10.
- 1873 New clock, peal of bells (£350) presented by the late R. Heath Esq. Gallery at West end removed. Memorial Chapel at East end built
- 1876 Heating apparatus fitted in church.
- 1893 Churchyard wall, heating coil, brass gas standards and vestry safe, costing over £200 given by the Parishioners and their friends.
- 1894 Church re-seated throughout by the present squire, Robert Heath and his two brothers, Sir James and Col. A.H. Heath.
- 1900 Repairs met by a public subscription of £176.
- 1903 Entrance in West side of the churchyard wall, with ironwork gate as a memorial of King Edward's Coronation.
- 1904 Font lined with copper.
- 1911 Lightning conductor erected on the Church Tower.
- 1913 Bazaar for Parochial purposes, amount raised £237.2.6.
- 1918 Bells re-hung. Organ rebuilt and enlarged. Re-lighting the Church by Incandescent fittings at a cost of £670.17.8. raised by voluntary subscriptions.

Biddulph Parish Church

Six Bells, 1873--Inscriptions

1. My gentle voice shall lead the cheerful sound:
Peace to this Parish: May goodwill abound.
2. May all in truth and harmony rejoice,
To honour Church and Queen with heart and voice.
3. Prosperity attend Old England's shore,
Let Biddulph flourish now and evermore.
4. With loving voice I call to Church and Prayer,
And bid the living for the grave prepare.
5. For mercies undeserved this peal is raised,
And may Thy Name, O God, through Christ be
praised.
6. To the honour and Glory of God this peal of six bells
was given to the Parish Church of Biddulph by
Robert Heath, Esq., of Biddulph Grange, 1873.

THE HISTORY OF BIDDULPH

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| 1042 | Griffin (A Saxon) was Thane of Biddulph. Biddulph Church a building of rough hewn timbers. | 1715 | 1st Jacobite Rebellion - two Mr Biddulphs fined. |
| 1086 | Bidolf mentioned in Domesday Book. | 1735 | Biddulph Workhouse erected at Gillow (500 years lease at 4d a year) |
| 1100 | Biddulph Manor given by King to Richard the Forester or Ormus (his son). | 1745 | 2nd Jacobite Rebellion - rebels marched through Biddulph to Leek and on return. |
| 1160 | Alina divided Bidolf Manor into 4 Manors: Overton, Middle Biddulph Nether Biddulph (Gillow) and Knypersley | 1760/1 | John Wesley preached at Biddulph. |
| 1223 | Hulton Abbey founded by Henry de Audley (whose ancestors owned Gillow) | 1772 | Burial of James Brindley (canal schemer) at Newchapel. |
| 1294 | Pope Nicholas' Taxation - Biddulph people to pay 7½ Marhs and 10/- in tithes for Ed. I's Scotch War. | 1778 ¹⁸⁷⁴ | Biddulph Parish School rebuilt by Robert Heath (formerly on Crabtree Green) |
| 1342 | Biddulph Church worth 40 Marhs (£27 a year) | 1807 | First Primitive Methodist Camp Meeting held on Mow Cop. |
| 1356 | Robert of Biddulph fought at Poitiers. | 1809 | Knypersley Estates bought by J. Bateman from heirs of Bowyers, Gresley, Heathcotes. |
| 1390 | Richard II granted Church and lands to Hulton Abbey for 25 marks. | 1833/35 | Main portion (except Tower) of Biddulph Church rebuilt. |
| 1408 | John Bydulphe of Biddulph M.P. for Newcastle. | 1850 | John Bateman built Knypersley Church School and Parsonage. |
| 1485 | Radulphus of Rudyard killed Richard III at Bosworth Field (end of War of Roses). | 1859 | Heaths opened Blast Furnases at Black Bull. Biddulph Almhouses |
| 1534 | Stained Glass window put in Biddulph Church by Biddulphs and Bowyers. | 1861 | Railway through Biddulph opened for coal and for passengers in 1864. |
| 1536 | Hulton Abbey dissolved by Henry III. Bowyers bought advowson of Church. | 1896 | Fire at Biddulph Grange - residence of Robert Heath. |
| 1558 | Biddulph Castle built by Francis Biddulph. | 1908/11 | New schools built at Knypersley, Moor and Bradley Green. |
| 1605 | 2 Gunpower Conspirators (Gerard and Greenway) had Biddulph connections. | 1924 | Prince of Wales opened Biddulph Grange as a Hospital. |
| 1643 | Biddulph Castle besieged by Cromwell's Army (under Sir W. Brereton) 150 Cavaliers taken with 200 horses. Biddulph fined £1000 | | |
| 1666 | Plague at Rushton 159 houses paid Hearth Tax (or Smoke Silver), 31 exempted. | | |
| 1688 | John Biddulph attended James II when he fled to France. | | |