Disley from chantry to parish: Sources for the history of Anglican chapels

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The church of St. Mary, Disley, stands high upon a hill above the village, reached by a steep path from the lychgate at the bottom of Red Lane. When Oliver Fizzwig, columnist on the Glossop Record, visited it, he wended his way through 'winding mazes of shrubbery'. John Byng had earlier been impressed by the view of the church from below and of the surrounding countryside from the churchyard above, but by the 1930s the building was concealed by lime trees, and today's visitor has to search even harder than Mr Fizzwig for that first view. Its history has also been difficult to see clearly and has to be approached by circuitous ways. Disley became a parish church only in 1913, and its previous status as a chantry and then as a parochial chapel has served to obscure its foundation and early history from the view of historians just as surely as the trees now obscure it from visitors.

Disley lies in the foothills of the Pennines in north-east Cheshire, within Macclesfield forest and close to the Derbyshire border. The village is on the edge of Lyme Park, where the patrons of Disley church, the Legh family, lived from the sixteenth century until the

1 S. Marshall, St. Mary's Church, Disley (1958): copy in Cheshire & Chester Archives & Local Studies (formerly Cheshire Record Office, and hereafter cited as CCALS), P 69/15/18; From canals to computers: A history of Disley compiled for the Disley Festival (1996), pp. 41–43.
2 CCALS, P 69/4619/1.
3 Church of England Record Centre (CofE Rec. Centre), EC 51767.
middle of the twentieth. Disley was one of the fourteen townships within Stockport parish, a territory covering over 25,000 acres. After 1300 virtually no new parishes were created in the English countryside until the nineteenth century, and any new chapels remained dependent on their parish churches. Such chapels generally had only limited functions and were described as ‘chapels of ease’. Disley’s chapel was built in the early sixteenth century by a member of the Legh family to house a perpetual chantry. The period was one when many new chapels were established in outlying parts of large parishes to meet local needs. Unlike medieval chapels, those of the sixteenth century were usually less dependent on the parish church than on their lay founders and local inhabitants. The dissolution of chantries under Edward VI led to the abandonment and disappearance of many of them, but Disley survived to become a parochial chapel of Stockport parish in 1558.

Sources for the history of chapels of ease and parochial chapels are generally poor when compared with those for parish churches, and it is often unclear where relevant information may be found, not least because the main ecclesiastical sources for parish churches did not systematically record chapels. This article assesses the sources for the history of Disley chapel, especially its origins as a chantry and its early post-Reformation status as a parochial chapel. In doing so it suggests ways in which the history of similar chapels with an uncertain background might be researched. The early sources for their history are not necessarily those most commonly used by historians of parish churches, and the usual finding aids and guides for the latter do not necessarily help in locating relevant material for chapels.

Ecclesiastical records for the pre-Reformation history of Disley chapel seem to be non-existent. It went unrecorded, for example, in the bishop’s registers. On the other hand, its origin as a perpetual chantry means that evidence survives in sources relating to its founder and his lands. Some of those sources were known to the nineteenth-century historians of east Cheshire, whose transcripts and histories are still the most important starting points for research


on Disley. In particular, documents among the Legh family papers often provide a key to understanding the significance of other records which refer to the chapel lands. Researching the earliest period of Disley chapel is thus essentially a matter of tracing the records relating to the land that it was built on and with which it was endowed.

Disley’s original status as a chantry meant that it was recorded in the standard sources generated by the seizure of chantry endowments under Edward VI. But its suppression was incomplete, largely because the odd circumstances of its foundation allowed the founder’s heir to claim ownership of the chapel’s endowment and pursue his claim through the Court of Augmentations. The detailed recollections of its early history which deponents offered in court are the sort of evidence which simply does not exist for chapels never threatened with dissolution. It is equally fortuitous that over the following forty years the authorities pursued what they suspected were ‘concealed’ lands associated with the chapel, resulting in a series of Exchequer court records which further described the chantry as it had been, and also cast light on the early history of the parochial chapel which succeeded it in 1558. It is important to recognise that retrospective evidence of this type may provide more detailed information than earlier sources, if the latter survive at all.

The new sources for the history of Disley chapel which have now been located deal with the chapel as such only indirectly, and they can be difficult to identify as significant from the calendars and indexes where they are listed. In the case of the Exchequer depositions, which directly concerned the ownership and tenancy of the chantry lands, a familiarity with the latter was a prerequisite for identifying those documents likely to contain useful information. Because it was only a parochial chapel after 1558, Disley seldom appeared in the diocesan records until the eighteenth century. The act books and bishops’ registers are poor sources for its history, while the faculty petitions and inventories of church goods which are so useful a source for parish churches either never existed for Disley or were not kept. For this period other sources have to be sought. Fortunately the fact that the chapel was under the patronage of the Legh family means that there is abundant evidence among their correspondence and papers.

From the early eighteenth century Disley, like other chapelries, was recorded in episcopal returns about the state of the diocese, and
later in the century the articles of enquiry drawn up prior to visitation begin to provide valuable detail. The fact that Disley was a poor living also meant that it appears among the records of Queen Anne’s Bounty, while the continuing need of Disley’s incumbents to augment their income in the nineteenth century makes their applications and correspondence a particularly useful source. Because parochial chapels owed church rates to the mother church, the churchwardens’ accounts from the parish church, Stockport, can also be informative. Increasingly, however, the chapelry managed its day-to-day affairs much as if it were a parish, and especially in the nineteenth century the same types of records were kept. For the later history of the parochial chapel the sources are thus similar to those used in research on parish churches, which are generally far more familiar to historians. Of particular significance are those relating to the financial support of a poor living and its eventual upgrading to full parish status.

**The foundation of Disley chapel**

From the beginning, Disley chapel was bound up with the history of the Legh family of Lyme, and the documentary evidence for its foundation and early history survives partly in their private family papers and partly in the public record of their landholdings and activities. The records created during and after the Reformation—when the chantry was surveyed and dissolved, and the status of its endowed lands became contested—are particularly valuable. Without them there would be no sources for that period in the chapel’s history.

The Leghs were a prominent landed family in Lancashire and Cheshire. The Lyme branch originally lived on their Lancashire estates at Haydock and Bradley near Winwick, moving to Lyme and enlarging an earlier house in the sixteenth century. Even then the family moved regularly between its estates. In the nineteenth century the Leghs were the subject of much research by antiquarians who located and transcribed documents about their history and estates. Especially important was Canon Francis Raines, whose papers, now held at Chetham’s Library in Manchester, include his transcripts from documents at the Public Record Office and the diocesan registry as well as in the family’s own archives. Raines’s transcripts were in turn used by William Beamont, John Earwaker, and George
Ormerod’s editor Thomas Helsby. The nineteenth-century historians were interested in the origins of Disley chantry and traced and published some of the relevant sources. Twentieth-century historians of Cheshire churches have tended to refer to their publications rather than returning to the original sources, among them, for the most part, Disley’s own local historian, Susan Marshall.

It is clear from the earliest sources that the builder of the chantry chapel at Disley was Sir Piers Legh IV, sometimes called Peter, who had been born in 1455, succeeded his grandfather in 1478, and like his forebears served in royal military campaigns and held public office. His wife Ellen, the sister of Thomas Savage (afterwards archbishop of York), died on 17 May 1491, when Sir Piers was still in his mid-thirties. In 1511, at the age of 56, Sir Piers resigned as steward of Blackburnshire in Lancashire, and soon afterwards took holy orders. The first time he was described as ‘knight and priest’ appears to be in a recovery of his lands dated 1514. However, he decided to found a chantry at Disley some years before his ordination, the first documentary evidence for his intention being an agreement of 1495 to inclose common land in Disley as a site for the chapel. The place chosen was two acres of common, set on a rise on the edge of open moorland within the forest of Macclesfield. The inclosure for the chapel was part of a

14 Beamont, House of Lyme, pp. 68–69; Ormerod, History, iii, p. 674.
Sir John Savage
m. 1467

Sir Piers Legh IV = Ellen Savage

Thomas Savage
archbishop of York
d. 1491

Piers Legh V
d. 1541

Sir Piers Legh VI
d. 1589

Piers Legh
d. 1570

m. 1585

Sir Piers Legh VII = Margaret Gerrard
d. 1636
d. 1603

Francis Legh
d. 1643

Revd. Thomas Legh
d. 1639

Richard Legh
d. 1687

Thomas Legh
d. 1697

Peter Legh VIII
d. 1744

d. by 1723

Peter Legh IX
d. 1792

Revd. Ashburnham Legh
d. 1775

Col. Thomas Peter Legh
d. 1797

m. 1828

Thomas Legh = Ellen Turner
d. 1857
d. 1831

m. 1847

Revd. Brabazon Lowther = Ellen Jane Legh

Figure 1 The Legh family
Disley

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general encroachment upon the open commons which was gathering pace at the end of the fifteenth century. Such inclosure was allowed by the court of the forest and manor of Macclesfield to landholders who wished to improve the waste and thereby add to their lands. Early in 1495 Sir Piers obtained the agreement of eleven of the most important landholders in Macclesfield forest to inclose two acres of common at Disley ‘unto the Edyficacon & makyng of a Chapell of our Lady calde the Deyn Chapell’, and for the support of a priest; the land was to belong to Sir Piers and his heirs on behalf of the chapel. The deed was published in full for the first time by Henry Heginbotham in 1892, and was not used in earlier accounts of the chantry’s origins.15

The inclosure led to conflict with other tenants and freeholders adjoining the commons, who had pastured their animals there for generations. Bills and depositions of witnesses for a court case in 1538 give more detail of the chapel lands. Two pieces of land had been inclosed. On one Sir Piers built the chapel and rooms for the priests, and laid out gardens for the latter. The other was a marshy area on the boundary of the common known as Dean Lache, which was to be used by the priest for grazing his horse.16

Chantryes like Disley, where masses were said for the souls of the dead, were characteristic of the later Middle Ages. Priests were often hired for a specified period under the conditions of a will. Men and women of means, however, more often sought to establish a perpetual chantry akin to a college. In those cases income from endowed lands paid a priest to say masses every day for the repose of the souls of the founder and all the departed. It became common practice among the wealthy gentry to establish a chantry during their own lifetime so that its chaplain could offer up prayers and masses for the founder and his family. Many chantryes were established within parish churches, but Stockport was six or seven miles from Lyme, and Sir Piers evidently wanted a foundation closer to Lyme for the convenience of his neighbours and tenants as well as his own household. Even though baptisms, marriages, and burials would still have to be conducted at Stockport, local people would be able to...

attend divine service closer to home. They could also participate in the particular benefits of a chantry by paying to have themselves and their families included in the prayers said there. That this was Sir Piers’s intention is suggested by the words in the 1495 inclosure deed: prayers were to be said not only for the soul of the founder but also ‘for all the gode doers thereto for ever’. Later evidence confirms the involvement of other local families.

Sir Piers is likely to have been motivated in part by the premature death of his wife, but there is also compelling evidence for another factor. Several traditions linked the founding of the chantry to the death of one of the Boteler family (variously named as Sir John and Sir Thomas) of Bewsey, near Warrington, at Sir Piers’s hands. The Botelers had a troubled relationship with theLeghs, involving litigation and violence, which stretched back over centuries to a marriage which had resulted in the loss of Boteler lands, but was resolved to some extent by another Legh–Boteler marriage in 1507. Beamont’s research on the Boteler family, however, convinced him that the death mentioned above could not have been the motive for the chantry’s foundation. Other historians have accepted his interpretation. Despite the remorse expressed in Sir Piers’s wills, his retirement from public life, and his ordination, the chantry has come to be seen as prompted simply by his wife’s early death.

An alternative explanation is offered by a document among the records of the Court of Augmentations which has not hitherto been noticed in any published source: the depositions of witnesses called before commissioners who were enquiring into the ownership of Disley chapel lands soon after the chantries were suppressed. Although the document is in poor condition and no date is legible, its context and content indicate that the depositions relate to a claim

17 Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, facing p. 159.
18 Public Record Office, Kew (PRO), E 134/22 Eliz./East. 2; E 134/22 Eliz./Trin. 8.
22 e.g. Ormerod, History, iii, p. 674; Earwaker, East Cheshire, ii, p. 91 n.; Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 157; Marshall, St. Mary’s Church, p. 5.
23 PRO, E 321/36/7.
made in 1548 by Sir Piers Legh VI, grandson of the chantry’s founder, that the lands confiscated by the Crown were never properly a chantry endowment and hence remained part of his own personal inheritance. A transcript of the decree resulting from this claim in 1549 is among the Raines manuscripts, and reveals that Sir Piers’s claim was successful.24

The tenor of the depositions suggests that the witnesses were giving evidence on behalf of the Crown. The most significant are two similar accounts of the means by which Stanley Hall, a large property in Disley township, had become part of the lands supporting the chantry. Both deponents stated that the hall and 110 acres had originally belonged to the Mottram family until sold by Roger Mottram (whom they knew by his pet-name of Hochkyn) to Sir Piers Legh IV.25 On Mottram’s death a dispute arose over its ownership. His granddaughter and heir had married Henry Savage, whose father, Lawrence Savage, attempted to claim Stanley Hall as part of her inheritance. The result was a fight with the Leghs in which one of Savage’s men was killed. Although the depositions do not make this clear, it is likely that the victim was a close relation of Sir Piers’s wife Ellen Savage, and that the death was the cause of much recrimination and guilt. In the event Bishop Thomas Savage, Sir Piers’s brother-in-law, was called in to arbitrate between the families. His decision was in favour of Sir Piers, but only on condition that Stanley Hall and all its lands be used to endow a chantry chapel. If the condition remained unfulfilled, the land was to revert to Henry Savage and his wife and their heirs.

There is reason to trust the accuracy of these two accounts. Both were given by men who were old enough to recall the events of the century before, who may have watched the building of the chapel over forty years earlier, and who would certainly have witnessed its growth and suppression. The dispute and its resolution took place some time between 1492, when Thomas Savage became a bishop, and 1495, when Sir Piers decided to inclose land on Disley common. Whatever else influenced Sir Piers to found a chantry, the condition attached to his retaining Stanley Hall was compelling. It thus seems that the legend associating the death of a Boteler with the chantry was based on a real conflict involving Sir Piers Legh and his relatives.

24 Chetham’s Library, Manchester, Mun.C.6.38, p. 450; Earwaker, East Cheshire, ii, p. 94.
25 PRO, E 321/36/7, first and third deponents; cf. Ormerod, History, iii, p. 832.
by marriage, but with the true identity of the victims being forgotten over time.

The early sixteenth-century documents chronicling Sir Piers Legh’s efforts to ensure a proper endowment for the chantry and its priests were identified by nineteenth-century historians and provide a large part of what is known of its later development. In 1514, after his ordination, Sir Piers settled all his lands in Lyme Handley on five trustees who, for ten years after his death, were to allow his executors to transfer profits to a locked coffer in Chester abbey for safekeeping. From those profits the executors were to buy land worth £10 a year to support Disley chapel. The trustees were also to hold Lyme itself in trust for his son, also called Piers, on condition that he allow the trustees to carry out the instructions in his father’s will.26 A surviving indenture of 1524 which further bound the younger Piers to complete the endowment also mentioned this earlier recovery and the purchase of Stanley Hall. It recorded that Piers signed it, made his bodily oath, and took mass in the chapel at Bradley.27 Like many other sixteenth-century chantry founders, Sir Piers thus evaded the mortmain legislation by granting lands intended to support a chantry to trustees rather than to the chantry itself.28

All did not go smoothly for the chantry priests after Sir Piers died in 1527, in particular because of conflict between his executors and his son. Although Sir Piers’s several wills were long and involved, they gave no details of how the chantry was to be staffed or endowed after his death,29 and a loophole was provided for his son at a time when the founding of any new chantries was being officially discouraged.30 The executors brought a case against the younger Piers before the Duchy of Lancaster court between 1534 and 1536,31 from which some of the depositions have been published. In the process witnesses recalled the intentions of the founder as expressed

30 Kreider, *English chantries*, p. 84.
on his deathbed.\textsuperscript{32} Four of the depositions were made by priests, all of whom can be identified from other sources as chantry priests who served at Disley. Two also witnessed the 1524 indenture.\textsuperscript{33}

About fourteen years later, one of the witnesses giving evidence before the Court of Augmentations also spoke of the problems which had arisen after Sir Piers's death, confirming that his son did not share his commitment to maintaining a perpetual chantry with the profits from family estates. He said that the younger Piers stopped the support of the stipendiary priests, but that it was later restored and then remained in place until the chantry was dissolved.\textsuperscript{34}

J. H. Bettey has commented that many parish histories devote little space to the impact of the religious changes of the Reformation period.\textsuperscript{35} For many places with established local churches, no parochial sources survive for this period; for Disley—merely an outlying township of Stockport with a chantry chapel—that seems even less chance of detailed information for the local impact of the changes. Evidence for Disley chantry survives in the routine Reformation sources, as it does for most other churches and chapels, extracts from which appeared in many of the older local and county histories. Fortunately for the historian, however, the conflict over the status of the original endowment and ownership of the chantry lands, which continued until 1580 or later, has left additional valuable sources of information on Disley chapel, its priests, and its people during this period of immense change.

Basic information on the value of the chantry and the identity of its resident chaplain on the eve of the Reformation is provided by the \textit{Valor Ecclesiasticus} of 1535. This first survey was not as thorough as later ones, but the annual income of £4 does seem low when compared with that originally intended by Sir Piers from Lyme Handley alone,\textsuperscript{36} quite apart from other gifts which are known to have been made; it may have been a reflection of the litigation involving the younger Piers and his father's executors in the 1530s.\textsuperscript{37}


\textsuperscript{33} PRO, E 134/21 & 22 Eliz./Mich. 6; Earwaker, \textit{East Cheshire}, ii, p. 91.

\textsuperscript{34} PRO, E 321/36/7, third deponent.

\textsuperscript{35} Bettey, \textit{Church and Parish}, p. 67.


\textsuperscript{37} Beamont, \textit{House of Lyme}, pp. 77–79.
The more thorough survey of chantries carried out in 1545–46 no longer survives for Cheshire, but its results were referred to in the 1548 survey under Edward VI. The yearly value of Disley was then estimated at £21 13s 14d—presumably a far more accurate reflection of its total wealth—and there is some evidence for the chapel’s bells, plate, and ornaments. An added memorandum indicates that the chantry endowment had later been contested by Sir Piers Legh VI, who was claiming the chapel’s lands and goods as his own. Records produced in 1549 during the confiscation of chantry lands give a full list of the lands supporting Disley chapel, which can be supplemented by the Court of Augmentations material already mentioned, and by later documents issuing from the cases heard before the Court of Exchequer in 1579–80.

The restoration of the chantry lands to Sir Piers VI in 1549 was intended to be temporary, ‘untill such tyme as other better matter shall be showne for the Kinge in that behalf’. In 1579 a new investigation into concealed lands led to a claim on behalf of the Crown against Sir Piers and one of his tenants. In the process of attempting to identify the real status of the lands, much evidence was gathered by the commissioners on the history of the chantry.

All the sources mentioned here indicate that local people had also participated in the chantry by giving lands or money, or by coming from surrounding townships to attend mass. Not all of the land donated was in Disley or even in Cheshire, though it is probable that much of the support came from the Leghs’ tenants. The Exchequer depositions also offer some information on how the chapel operated in the first years after it was consecrated as a parochial chapel. This is a period in its history of which little has previously been known. Its consecration in 1558 was recorded in the bishop’s register, the first

39 PRO, E 301/8, no. 27.
40 PRO, SC 6/Edw. VI/65, m. 4d.
41 PRO, E 321/26/88; E 321/36/7.
42 PRO, E 134/21 & 22 Eliz./Mich. 6; E 134/22 Eliz./East. 2; E 134/22 Eliz./Trin. 8; cf. *Calendar of the Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office, 1575–1578* (HMSO, 1982), pp. 541–42.
44 PRO, E 321/36/7; E 134/21 & 22 Eliz./Mich. 6; E 134/22 Eliz./East. 2; E 134/22 Eliz./Trin. 8.
45 CCALS, EDA 2/1, pp. 92–93.
time that Disley chapel appears in diocesan records. The chapel was
dedicated to the Virgin Mary, as the chantry had been, and it was
made parochial after an agreement between Sir Piers Legh and the
inhabitants of Disley on the one hand, and Sir Edward Warren,
patron of Stockport, and the inhabitants of Stockport on the other.
The consecration itself has been described as ‘protestant’ in several
sources, including Beamont, who misdated it to the period imme­
diately after the accession of Elizabeth I, but it was actually
performed by the Roman Catholic Bishop Cuthbert Scot of Chester
in July 1558, when Mary was still on the throne.

Disley chapel and the Leghs

In 1558 Sir Piers Legh VI, the founder’s grandson, was a party to the
petition presented to Bishop Scot and to the agreement with Sir
Edward Warren (as patron of Stockport) to consecrate the building
as a parochial chapel. The consecration was approved on condition
that the people of Disley Dean should support their own priest and
defray all expenses relating to divine worship, repair the building
themselves, and pay customary dues to the parish church at Stock­
port.47

Presumably the living immediately became vested in Sir Piers
Legh VI and his heirs, though the Chester diocesan records from the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries seem not to record any pre­
sentations, admissions, or institutions to chapelries, as opposed to
rectories and vicarages.48 It seems likely from the evidence which
follows that an arrangement was made whereby the Leghs always
appointed the curates themselves. The evidence of the Exchequer
depositions of 1579–80 shows that they continued to support the
curates of Disley financially. A number of deponents stated that Sir
Piers VI paid the priests and later the curates an allowance, either
personally or through his bailiffs. Richard Wilde of Disley recalled
that he had once accompanied the curate Hamnet Legh to Lyme,
where he saw him sit down and receive his overdue wages from Sir
Piers himself.49 Contrary to Marshall’s suggestion that no curates
officiated at Disley before 1590 because the recusant Sir Piers failed

47 CCALS, EDA 2/1, pp. 92–93; Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 159.
48 CCALS, EDA 1/4 and other records.
49 PRO, E 134/21 & 22 Eliz./Mich. 6; E 134/22 Eliz./East. 2; E 134/22 Eliz./Trin. 8.
to appoint any,\textsuperscript{50} the Exchequer depositions confirm that three men served there in succession from 1558. One of them was Hamnet Legh. Even if Sir Piers and his family were recusants, as was suspected at the time, and held their own services at Lyme using domestic chaplains,\textsuperscript{51} it is more likely that rather than neglecting the newly consecrated chapel, Sir Piers would have appointed curates whose religious views accorded as closely as possible with his own.

As Disley was a mere chapelry, not entitled to tithes and oblations and with no glebe, the early incumbents relied entirely on financial support from the patron and congregation. There is evidence in the Legh family papers of how Sir Piers intended that the chapel should be supported. Under the marriage settlement of his grandson and heir Piers Legh VII and Margaret Gerrard in 1579, Sir Piers ensured that £20 a year was provided for a school and a priest at Disley.\textsuperscript{52} As patrons, the Leghs would also have become responsible for the upkeep of the chancel, while the inhabitants would have had to repair the nave. The Leghs may in fact have paid for repairs beyond what was expected, and certainly recast some of the bells in the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{53} No chapelwardens’ accounts survive for this period to clarify the respective involvement of inhabitants and patron.

There is, however, correspondence between the Leghs and some of their curates at Disley in the Legh family papers. The earliest are five letters concerning Henry Sumner, minister at Disley between 1590 and his death in 1606, who was also the family chaplain and a close friend of Sir Piers VII.\textsuperscript{54} Henry presided at the domestic chapel in Lyme Hall as well as at Disley, and in fact lived at Lyme with the family, though his travels with them to their other homes meant that he was sometimes absent from his cure, as in 1602, when Sir Piers’s friends wrote to him at home in Fulham, requesting Sumner’s return to Disley.\textsuperscript{55} The eulogy on his memorial plaque in Disley church,

\textsuperscript{50} Marshall, ‘Disley vicarage’, p. 138.
\textsuperscript{52} JRULM, Legh of Lyme, Box R, no. B11.
\textsuperscript{54} JRULM, Legh of Lyme Correspondence.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. R., Gerrard and others to Legh, 2 Apr. 1602.
placed there by Sir Piers, attests to their attachment and confirms the high regard in which he was held as a minister and a preacher.\textsuperscript{56}

The relationship of patron and incumbent reflected in the letters of Samuel Bardsley—perpetual curate at Disley for almost fifty years in the seventeenth century—was quite different. Richard Legh was only eight years old when he inherited Lyme in 1643, at about the same time that Bardsley was appointed to the chapelry. By the time of the Restoration in 1660, when Richard was M.P. for Cheshire, the curate was already in middle age. His letters reveal him not as valued friend and adviser but as his patron’s grateful and rather obsequious servant. Richard apparently took an interest in the congregation at Disley, and sent a copy of Charles II’s restoration proclamation for Bardsley to read in the chapel; this act elicited an effusive reply from the curate, who professed himself and the congregation as joyous as his master to see the monarch restored. The Legh family attended Disley chapel while they were at Lyme Hall, but Bardsley also held private services for them on Sunday afternoons, presumably in the chapel which Richard Legh had altered and redecorated.\textsuperscript{57} There is little in the Disley records to equal the private sources, apart from an entry in the chapel register by Bardsley soon after the Restoration, recording the donation of a silver cup by Richard’s brother Thomas.\textsuperscript{58}

The correspondence also reveals that the patron helped find a replacement curate when Bardsley was ill or absent. After suffering a stroke in 1685 which left him unable to stand, Bardsley appealed to Richard Legh to call on Mr Woodham to officiate at Easter, while in May 1704, when there was apparently no licensed curate at Disley, Peter Legh sent for Samuel Hulme, curate at Macclesfield, asking him to officiate at Lyme or Disley the next Sunday. Although Hulme was inconvenienced by the request, he agreed.\textsuperscript{59}

There is little evidence of the arrangements which the Leghs made for the nomination and support of curates at Disley in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries except among their family

\textsuperscript{56} Beamont, \textit{House of Lyme}, p. 119.


\textsuperscript{58} CCALS, P 69/1/1, s.a. 1661; Heginbotham, \textit{Stockport}, ii, p. 161.

\textsuperscript{59} JRULM, Legh of Lyme Corr., Bardsley to Legh, 31 Mar. 1685; Hulme to Legh, 4 May 1704.
papers. In 1704 the records drawn up when Queen Anne’s Bounty was established to augment the incomes of the poorest clergy merely listed Disley as a living worth £20 a year. In 1705 the total income was not stated, but it all came from the Leghs.\textsuperscript{60} The early chapel records offer scant information regarding the incumbents,\textsuperscript{61} and there is no documentation surviving in the diocesan archive of any nominations by the Leghs to the cure at Disley until 1706, when John Dearle was nominated. This young man was already employed as an usher at Macclesfield school, but had also been officiating at Disley chapel since the end of 1705:

Mr dearl the bearer has bin w:h us half a year in that time has gaind the general approbacion of all my neighbors w:ch w:h his good character and knowne Abilitys I dare engage will make him very acceptble to Yr Lordship (his deserts demanding a better place than Dishley) this encourages me to Recommend him . . . \textsuperscript{62}

A letter from Dearle to Legh also survives, in which he wrote of the advantage which he had experienced after leaving Disley from Legh’s support.\textsuperscript{63}

By 1700 the low value of livings in chapelries was a widespread problem. At Disley the curates were particularly dependent on the Leghs’ goodwill. In 1717 William Radmore wrote to Peter Legh VIII explaining his disappointment in the cure and bemoaning the poor return from the school, a private establishment founded by the Leghs as a grammar school to which they held the right of appointment. Radmore had obviously taken on the schoolmaster’s position to augment his meagre clerical income. It seems that the support which the Leghs had initially provided for the school may have diminished, so that the master no longer had a settled income but had to rely upon fees paid by pupils. Pleading for a ‘Competent Maintenance’ for his family, Radmore gratefully acknowledged that ‘yours and Madam Legh’s contributions have been my support; the rest so precarious, little and ill-paid that I cannot subsist longer without an Augmentation’. He went on to beg that Peter Legh make up the deficiency in his salary as curate or assist him in ensuring that

\textsuperscript{60} CCALS, EDA 6/1/1–3.
\textsuperscript{61} CCALS, P 69/1/1.
\textsuperscript{63} JRULM, Legh of Lyme Corr., Dearle to Legh, 20 Feb. 1710.
contributions from the congregation be established ‘on a new Bottom more binding and certain’.64

Whether his wish was ever satisfied is not clear. He did not suggest that his income be supplemented by money from Queen Anne’s Bounty, but during the incumbency of James Roe this was finally arranged for Disley by the same Peter Legh, who in 1740 conveyed Clough’s farm at Golborne in Lancashire to the Governors of Queen Anne’s Bounty in order to secure an augmentation of £16 a year. Roe and his successors as curate until 1800 or later were also paid a gratuity of £30 a year by the Legh family. The Leghs still contributed towards the curate’s income in the nineteenth century, at an enhanced level, but it was never a fixed allowance secured on any particular estate.65

From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, many more diocesan records concerning the incumbents and their assistant curates have survived, but for an insight into the personal relations of patron and curate the Legh correspondence cannot be equalled. James Roe, who was appointed curate by Peter Legh VIII, had what he considered a close friendship with the latter’s nephew, namesake, and heir even before he inherited Lyme in 1744. Roe offered advice and sympathy in reply to the younger Peter’s rather melancholy letters, without being particularly religious in tone. It is obvious that there were some rocky periods in the relationship. The stumbling blocks were financial, and followed the curate’s efforts to consolidate his income by charging pew rents and accepting a second cure at Macclesfield in 1756.66 On the latter occasion Peter Legh was unhappy at the prospect of Roe’s non-residence at Disley:

in truth it has long been my resolution to have a resident Minister at Disley first for the convenience of the people and secondly for my own convenience for the family at Lyme to be certain of having a respectable person to read prayer each day the family are at Lyme—and a person fitt for myself to converse with.67

64 Ibid., Radmore to Legh, 2 Apr. 1717; CCALS, EDA 6/3/13.
65 CoFE Rec. Centre, QAB, K1343; JRULM, Legh of Lyme, Box T, no. C6, corr. 1739–40; account of income, 1789–90; CCALS, EDV 7/1/107; EDV 7/2/112; EDV 7/4/76.
67 Ibid., Legh to Roe, 16 Mar. 1756.
He eventually approved the appointment as assistant curate of Bartholomew Booth, a young man who was also willing to take over the vacant schoolmastership without being licensed. A couple of years later, James Roe was forced to organize a replacement for Booth, who for some unexplained reason had incurred the patron’s displeasure. The diocesan records show that he was succeeded by a series of stipendiary curates, each staying only a short time, which cannot have been to Peter Legh’s satisfaction.68

By 1763, after Booth’s departure, the school had further declined, and papers and letters in the Legh family archive reveal that it became a mere charity school, where education was free and classes were taught in English rather than Latin. In the latter part of the century, the incumbent George Barbor claimed that Disley had no school. Clearly the church was no longer involved in providing teachers.69

After James Roe’s death in 1765, Peter Legh was no doubt intent on nominating a resident curate to the chapelry, and in fact George Barbor, who held the cure from then until 1799, always lived at Disley, in a house belonging to the Leghs just fifty yards from the chapel.70 His nomination may have been influenced by the fact that he was probably an old friend of his patron’s brother the Revd Ashburnham Legh.71

The Legh family attended church at Disley in Barbor’s time, but he was probably also expected to go up to Lyme every day to read prayers, as his predecessors had done.72 It is unlikely that Peter Legh, who died in 1792, was personally much involved in the chapel’s affairs in later life, since nothing seems to survive among the family papers from that period. For some years before his death he was in ill health and confined to home, affairs on the estate being controlled by his spinster sister Ann and his steward Richard Orford. Peter’s burial at Disley, however, marked a change in family tradition: after

68 Ibid., Roe to Legh, 17, 20, 29 Mar. 1756; 11 Feb. 1760; CCALS, EDP 104/1/1.
70 CCALS, EDV 7/4/76.
72 CCALS, EDV 7/1/107.
that time most family burials took place there instead of at Winwick in Lancashire. Legh’s nephew and heir Colonel Thomas Peter Legh mainly lived at Newton and Haydock, where he built a vast new house. After his death in 1797, the estate was placed in the hands of trustees, as his eldest son Thomas was only five years old. The Revd William Heron was already vicar of Middlewich and never lived at Disley. During his incumbency the cure was again in the hands of stipendiary curates.

During the first half of the nineteenth century other prominent local families became involved in the chapel, the school, and village affairs generally, though none had the status and wealth of the Leghs, who were still the main landowners in Disley and remained patrons and benefactors. Far more evidence exists for this period, particularly among the diocesan and chapelry records, those of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, printed church magazines, and newspapers, all of which document the support given by the Leghs and others to the various restoration and rebuilding projects. After Thomas Legh came of age in 1814, Lyme Hall was renovated and the family lived there for the rest of the century. When Disley chapel was enlarged, they attended church there rather than at the private chapel in Lyme Hall, and—as expected of the Victorian landed gentry—sponsored and encouraged the church’s educational and charitable efforts.

Disley and Stockport parish

Because a visit to Stockport involved a long and often difficult journey, the inhabitants of late medieval Disley, Lyme Handley, and neighbouring townships would have taken the opportunity to hear mass at the chantry chapel even though they still had to travel to the parish church for marriages, funerals, and special feast days. Chantry priests did not officially have cure of souls, but in practice they often served as more than just singers of masses for the dead. After the

74 CCALS, EDP 104/1/1; EDA 1/10, ff. 14v.-15; Ormerod, *History*, iii, p. 83.
75 CCALS, EDP 104/1/1; EDV 7/3/158; EDV 7/4/76.
76 CCALS, EDP 104/2/1; EDV 7/4/76; P 69/5252/28; Marshall, *St. Mary’s Church; Stockport Parish Magazine*, 1869–71, esp. Jan., June, Sept. 1869; Feb., Apr., June, Sept. 1870 (copies in CCALS, P 14/3435/12/1); Coff: Rec. Centre, EC 28558.
dissolution of the chantry, the chapel no longer had its own financial support or any recognized status within the parochial system, even during Queen Mary’s reign.\textsuperscript{77} The consecration document of 1558 outlined the problems which resulted for Disley’s inhabitants. Like others in the outlying portions of a large parish, they had always encountered difficulty and even danger in attending divine service, taking babies for baptism, and carrying the dead so many miles for burial.\textsuperscript{78} Consecration as a parochial chapel allowed all the functions and rites of the mother church to be performed, and ensured that the chapel would have its own perpetual curate.

The responsibilities of Disley’s inhabitants as outlined in 1558 have already been described. Their dues included church mizes (rates), fees, and the provision of a pew for their own use in the mother church at Stockport. Their tithes and oblations also belonged to the rector of Stockport, but in 1579 Sir Piers Legh VI bought a life interest in them in return for £10 a year. The rector retained the right to any tithes due on cattle and sheep brought into Disley from elsewhere but not normally pastured there, as well as those paid by folk in Disley who normally lived elsewhere.\textsuperscript{79}

In return for those dues, the rector of Stockport paid a fixed annual stipend to the curate serving Disley. It was first recorded only in 1705, when the sum due was expressed archaically as 20 nobles.\textsuperscript{80} It seems most likely to have originated in an agreement preceding the consecration of 1558 for which no documentation has apparently survived. The noble, worth 1/2 mark (6s 8d), had been the main gold coin in circulation for a century after 1344, the name and denomination being revived with the George-noble, struck in small quantities between 1526 and 1532. Even though few if any nobles were still in circulation after the 1540s the colloquial name for 1/2 mark was clearly still in widespread use in the middle and later sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{81} Whatever its origin, the payment of £6 13s 4d a year was at first a significant part of the income available to the

\textsuperscript{77} Dickens, English Reformation, pp. 210, 279.
\textsuperscript{78} CCALS, EDA 2/1, pp. 92–3, summarised in Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 159.
\textsuperscript{79} JRULM, Legh of Lyme, Box T, no. C6.
\textsuperscript{80} CCALS, EDA 6/1/2. This paragraph was contributed by C. P. Lewis.
perpetual curate of Disley, though inflation eventually ate away its purchasing power, leaving a regular payment from the mother church with a value more symbolic than real. Payment apparently lapsed altogether while William Nichols was rector of Stockport (1693–1716), but was resumed after his death through the good offices of the Leghs. In 1811 the payment was reported to be 'optional', and it remained difficult to extract from a new rector of Stockport in 1876.

No other documentary evidence has been found of the chapel's relationship with Stockport parish church in the sources searched for the second half of the sixteenth century. The gift of the living probably always belonged to the Leghs. No letters from the patrons of Stockport, the Warren family, survive among the Legh family papers, so the relationship between the two patrons is unknown.

Possibly when their curate was absent in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the parishioners were expected to walk to the nearest chapel, two or three miles away, or even to Stockport. Money for the pew in Stockport parish church was still being collected from Disley's inhabitants in 1759, the earliest date for which Disley chapelwardens' accounts survive. That year John Ardron and John Adkinson collected 8s. However, their accounts show that by then the money was not being remitted to the churchwardens of Stockport, though a proportion of the church mizes was always sent. The amount varied over the next forty years and at times no collection was made at all. The seats at Stockport allotted to Disley and the other out-townships were still there in the early nineteenth century.

During the Commonwealth, parliament ordered that tithes raised in Disley, worth about £10 a year, were to be diverted from the rector of Stockport for the benefit of Disley's own minister. John Morrill claims that this award made Disley a parish in its own

82 CCALS, EDA 6/1/2; EDA 6/4/8; JRULM, Legh of Lyme Corr., Radmore to Legh, 2 Apr. 1717; Ormerod, History, iii, p. 800.
83 CCALS, EDV 7/4/76; P 69/9/4–5.
84 CCALS, P 69/11/1; Stockport churchwardens' accounts (which start in 1683) not examined.
85 Heginbotham, Stockport, i, p. 212.
right, but if this was the case for the short period of the Commonwealth, it did not remain so after the Restoration, when the tithes were restored to Stockport. In 1717 William Radmore as minister at Disley certified to his bishop that there is no settled maintenance for the Minister of the Parochial Chapel of Disley either by Demesns Glebe Tithes &c but only Twenty Nobles Yearly from the Mother Church of Stockport, and Surplice Fees. The Rest Voluntary Contributions amounting in whole to about Twenty Five Pounds per annum.

The mother church at Stockport retained an important role in the ordination of stipendiary curates to serve its chapellries. The parish bundles among the diocesan records contain papers relating to the assistant curates appointed to Disley from 1758 onwards. Disley’s incumbents could nominate and appoint their own stipendiary curates with the approval of their patron, but the publication of the ‘si quis’, essential before the curate was accepted for ordination as a deacon or priest, was still almost always done by the rector at the parish church, and the stipendiary curates, together with the perpetual curates, were regarded as clergy of Stockport parish. Stipendiary curates could not be appointed until they had been ordained as deacons, and if they wished to administer the sacraments they had to become priests. Each step required the cooperation of the rector of Stockport.

There is evidence among the Disley chapelry papers in the Legh archive that special arrangements were made between the patron of Disley and the rector of Stockport to provide a clergyman from Stockport church during the period 1725–33, when there seems to have been no perpetual curate at Disley. There is no record of this period in the diocesan records. It seems that for at least some of this time a curate based in Stockport, the Revd Downes, fulfilled duties both there and at Disley.

The surviving chapelwardens’ accounts for Disley do not begin until 1759, but church mizes paid by the chapelries to Stockport in

89 e.g. JRULM, Legh of Lyme Corr., Roe to Legh, 17, 20, 29 Mar. 1756.
90 CCALS, EDP 104/1/1 includes ‘si quis’ papers for Disley curates.
91 JRULM, Legh of Lyme, Box T, no. C6.
the early eighteenth century appear in the Stockport churchwardens' accounts. In 1759 Disley's chapelwardens collected six rates throughout the year, each of 19s 6d, of which four (£3 18s) had to be paid to Stockport. The amount given in rates varied from year to year, but by the 1790s Disley was generally paying far more, for instance thirteen rates (£12 13s 6d) in 1798. By then the chapelwardens made up to six trips to Stockport each year to pay the chapel dues and to be sworn in at the church court, all of which added to the financial burden. By the early nineteenth century Stockport was experiencing problems in collecting the contributions from its townships. In 1810, when promoters applied for an Act of Parliament to rebuild the parish church, they stated that many estates in the out-townships had become exempt from paying church rates, though the Disley chapelwardens' accounts showed that they at least were still paying theirs, amounting to sixteen rates, £15 12s, out of a total collection of less than £26. The collection was now based on two levies a year. Thus often over half the Disley chapel rates were paid to Stockport, but this was a small amount compared with the value of the township's tithes, which also went to Stockport. In 1768 the total gross annual value of Stockport rectory was £1,621 5s 4d, an enormous increase over its the value in the 1650s, and a stark contrast with the few pounds which the living at Disley was worth even after it had been augmented by Queen Anne's Bounty. Disley's tithe contribution in 1768 was £103 12s 6d.

The preface to the newly published *Stockport Parish Magazine* in 1869 gave a contemporary view of changes in the relationship between Stockport and its parochial chapels. According to the editors, the ancient parish was now so thickly populated that it had taken on characteristics akin to those of a diocese, and the districts and chapelries had ceased to have any meaningful connection with the mother church. The perpetual curacies were 'virtually rectories', whose incumbents enjoyed freehold rights over their benefices, and whose congregations led an existence totally separate from that of Stockport church, a situation not (in their opinion)

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92 e.g. Heginbotham, *Stockport*, i, p. 272. The original accounts have not been examined.
93 CCALS, P 69/11/1.
95 CCALS, P 69/11/1, s.a. 1810.
conducive to ‘religious unity . . . and strength’. The magazine, it was hoped, would foster an interest in one another’s ‘spiritual and moral well-being’. By this time many of the ‘virtual rectories’ were pushing for and achieving the benefits of full parochial status, which may explain why the parish magazine appears to have survived in an all-inclusive form, embracing the whole of the ancient parish, for only three years. By 1882 Disley was one of only six parochial chapelries left in the whole deanery.

For the remaining perpetual curacies, including Disley, full parochial status was achieved only after considerable delay. In 1838 Disley chapel was again licensed for marriages, a right lost in 1754 with the implementation of the Marriage Act. The fees for marriages, however, were still due to the rector of Stockport, and evidently he insisted that they were sent, for the Revd Prescot requested them in 1863. In 1875, when C. J. Satterthwaite, incumbent of Disley, first enquired of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners whether Disley could become a separate parish, the requirement to transfer marriage fees to the rector appears to have been a strong motivation. When a new rector was appointed soon afterwards, Satterthwaite was allowed to retain the marriage fees, and he seems to have let the matter of full parochial status drop for some years, returning the completed form which he had obtained from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1875 only after an interval of some twenty years. The delay may have been influenced also by the need to concentrate on accommodating the population in the new industrial district of Furness Vale, but it seems that there were other reasons, including confusion over boundaries and the bishop’s tardiness even after the application was finally sent in 1895. In the event it was another eighteen years before Disley was finally assigned its own district and became a parish.

The chapel building and its furnishings

None of the available documentation for the early years of the chapel reveals precisely when it was built. A date soon after 1495, when land was inclosed from the commons for the purpose, seems more likely.
Disley

than one around 1510, which has hitherto been favoured seemingly on the supposition (now seen to be in error) that the chantry was founded then.\(^{102}\) The chapel certainly existed as a complete and usable building by 1514,\(^{103}\) and later memories of the earliest priest whose name has been preserved push the date back a little further. In the late 1540s the Court of Augmentations heard from one deponent that Sir Piers Legh had taken his oath to give Stanley Hall to a chantry in the ‘old chapel’, though it is not certain that the reference was to a building at Disley.\(^{104}\) The only surviving parts of the sixteenth-century chapel are the west tower and the beautiful nave roof, panelled and with demi-angels and elaborate carved bosses, which was reused for the nineteenth-century nave.\(^{105}\)

Far more is known about the early fittings of the chapel than about the fabric. The chantry certificate of 1548 suggests that the tower initially had a ring of four bells. They must have been installed by the Legh family, since Sir Piers VI successfully reclaimed them when the chantry was suppressed.\(^{106}\) The Court of Augmentations depositions, however, prove that it had five bells, of which Legh took away four;\(^{107}\) the fifth must have been given by someone else, perhaps the inhabitants at large, and have been taken down before 1548. It seems likely that Sir Piers returned the original bells when the chapel was consecrated. They were recast in 1617 by Oldfield, and bear the date and the Legh crest, but were removed from the church in 1837.\(^{108}\)

The 1548 certificate also listed 8 oz. of plate and jewels, and goods and ornaments worth 33s. 8d. A chalice was successfully claimed by Sir Piers Legh as part of his inheritance.\(^{109}\) For many churches and chapels, the chantry certificates provide the only indication of the riches which they possessed before the Reformation, but for Disley


\(^{103}\) Beamont, *House of Lyme*, p. 69.

\(^{104}\) PRO, E 321/36/7.


\(^{106}\) PRO, E 301/8, no. 27; Ormerod, *History*, iii, p. 886.

\(^{107}\) PRO, E 321/36/7.

\(^{108}\) TLCAS, lxviii, pp. 34–37.

\(^{109}\) PRO, E 301/8, no. 27; Ormerod, *History*, iii, p. 886.
the statements of deponents in the cases heard in the 1540s and 1579–80, although differing in detail, offer a fuller description of the chantry’s furnishings. It boasted a gilded silver cross, worth £10 or more, which must have been removed before 1548, and three chalices; the priests wore black velvet copes and vestments of silk
and black velvet with red crosses. William Woodruff of Whaley, who claimed that there had been a song school at the chantry, also mentioned an organ.  

Most of what is known about the interior appearance of the chapel from the mid-sixteenth century to the mid-eighteenth is based on present features or on descriptions by earlier visitors. In the seventeenth century the chancel contained a raised altar-tomb, inlaid with brass inscriptions and an effigy of a woman in late sixteenth-century costume. A screen divided chancel and nave, and the windows contained armorial bearings and portraits of the Leghs. John Byng, visiting the chapel in 1790, was delighted with the way it was fitted up. He noted that King David, playing his harp, was painted under the singing gallery, evidently the earliest reference to a gallery at the west end of the nave. Later rebuilding swept away almost everything from earlier centuries, except for some wall memorials, the seventeenth-century royal arms, and chapelwardens’ staves, perhaps of 1820. There seem to be no surviving seating plans or descriptions of the pews before their replacement in 1868.

The chapelwardens’ accounts of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century contain few entries relating to the church or its decor except for the bells. In 1811 the Revd William Marriott recorded that the chancel and nave were ‘in tolerable repair’, but with an increasing population and the desire for improvement it was not long before plans were being made to enlarge the chapel, and over the course of the century the interior underwent a number of alterations and restorations. Financial support came from several sources, including the Legh family and Thomas and Richard Orford, sons of the Leghs’ eighteenth-century steward Richard Orford. A meeting held in September 1825 ordered that a rate of 6d. in the pound be collected for chapel repairs, and the Church Building Society made a grant of £150 in 1828. Enlargement of the

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110 PRO, E 321/36/7; E 134/22 Eliz./East. 2; E 134/22 Eliz./Trin. 8.
111 British Library, Harleian MS. 2151, cited in CCALS, P 69/4619/1, f. 7; Marshall, St. Mary’s Church, p. 16; Ormerod, History, iii, p. 833.
112 Saint Mary’s, Disley: The story of our church (1987).
113 Stockport Parish Magazine, 1869.
114 CCALS, P 69/11/1.
115 CCALS, EDV 7/4/76.
116 Tablet on south wall of chancel.
117 CCALS, P 69/4619/1, enclosure dated 1867; Saint Mary’s, Disley (1987); History of Disley (and handbook of sale of work in aid of the proposed Disley Institute) (Manchester, 1903), p. 23.
accommodation began in 1824, when the number of sittings was increased to 160. Further alterations took place in 1828 and between 1835 and 1837, raising the number of sittings to 460 and then to 884. The chancel and vestry were rebuilt in brick, and the chapel gained aisles with galleries containing free sittings. No record of these major alterations appears among the faculties recorded in the bishop’s register of the period.  

Thomas Legh replaced the armorial glass in 1835 with sixteenth-century glass from Nuremberg collected on his travels, and the bells in 1837 with a new peal of six. In 1836 the Orford family donated the organ which is still in the west gallery. The restorations and repairs of 1868 were fully described in the Stockport Parish Magazine. During the second half of the century all the major furnishings of the chapel—pulpit, font, and lectern—were replaced by well-to-do donors. More building restorations were completed in the 1880s and 1890s, and were recorded in the vestry minute books and by faculties.

Internal church organization before 1800

Many of the sources which provide evidence for the foundation of the chantry also identify the priests who officiated there and reveal how it functioned. The nineteenth-century histories have until now summarized what is known of the priests, and the brass tablet listing them, which was placed on the west wall of the church in 1911, was based upon those published accounts. However, the new evidence from the Court of Augmentations and Exchequer depositions allows more names to be added to the list of clergy, besides revising some of what has been previously assumed.

The belief that the chapel’s founder, Sir Piers Legh IV, was the first incumbent seems to have originated with Beamont, arguing on the grounds that Legh is not known to have sought a benefice else-

118 Richards, Old Cheshire churches, p. 144.
120 D. C. Wickens, The Disley Renn: An essay in investigation (copy at CCALS, P 69/4619/2); Stockport Advertiser, 1 Apr. 1836.
121 Stockport Parish Magazine, 1869.
122 Ibid.; CCALS, P 69/4619/1, f. 26v.
123 CCALS, P 69/6/4–9; P 69/13; EDA 2/28; EDP 104/2/1.
125 CCALS, EDP 104/2/1; P 69/6/9.
where. Like the assumption that he entered a monastery in the years between his wife’s death and the start of work on Disley chapel, this is merely an assumption with no documentary backing. If he did participate in the masses sung there, he was not the only priest at Disley. There are a couple of references to Ralph (or Randle) Whittle or Whitelegh, priest at Disley before 1530, and it has been assumed that he followed Sir Piers as chantry priest from 1527. He certainly seems to have left Disley by 1530, but evidence given by several witnesses soon after 1548 stated that he was a priest there ‘fowrtie yeres past’. An aged priest and another deponent both confirmed that Ralph had occupied Dean Lache meadow, ‘lying at Dysteley at the old chapell . . . in parcell of payment for his burde or table’. They also stated that he was supported by rent of 13s. 4d. a year out of the More family’s holding at Ringstones in Whaley, and by a smaller amount from a cottage at Offerton.

Sir Piers Legh IV’s intention, as reported by deponents in the 1530s and 1540s, was to have three priests and two deacons staffing the chantry at Disley, and at least for a time after his death that level was achieved. One of the deponents in 1579 confirmed that there were always two or three priests who sang masses. He went on to name Whitley’s successors as Thomas Turner, Thomas Jodrell, Thomas Lewes, Thomas Davenport, and James Bancroft, though it is not clear from the wording which of them served concurrently. From this list only two priests have previously been known, both of whom made depositions before the Duchy court in 1534 relating to their master’s intentions for the chantry. They were also present at Sir Piers’s deathbed, and must have been part of his household. Thomas Lewes or Lewyns was one of Sir Piers’s chaplains from the late fifteenth century, witnessing several of his legal transactions, including his promise to give Stanley Hall to a chantry chapel, and

127 Marshall, *St. Mary’s Church*, p. 5.
130 PRO, E 321/36/7.
131 Cf. for Ringstones PRO, E 134/21 & 22 Eliz./Mich. 6; E 134/22 Eliz./East. 2; E 134/22 Eliz./Trin. 8.
probably stayed on at Disley until 1534 or later. Thomas Davenport was named as chaplain of Disley in 1535. In 1540 he was made an executor of the will of Robert Ardern, once a servant of Sir Piers Legh IV, who gave 6s. 8d. to Disley chantry and asked that his name be included in the 'boke of broderhode', possibly the bede roll described later by witnesses.

By 1580 there was no-one left among those called to make depositions who remembered the earliest of these priests, but five of the tenant farmers who lived in Disley could name a total of eight priests who had served in their lifetimes. They added to those already named William Hacche and Hugh Fowle, both of whom had also been at Sir Piers's deathbed in 1527 and had given evidence before the Duchy court, but did not apparently come to serve at Disley until later. According to the witnesses, Fowle had served at the chapel for about twenty years until his death about 1563, thus being the priest in charge not only when the chantry was suppressed, its ornaments and vestments taken away, the bells pulled down, and the lands reclaimed by Sir Piers Legh VI, but right through Mary's reign and beyond its consecration as a parochial chapel. He was followed by Lawrence Pinnington, who also served for life.

The first chantry priests evidently lived on income derived from rents and by cultivating some of the chantry lands themselves. The lands are listed in several sources, including the Ministers' Accounts of 1549 and the depositions of both court cases, and suggest that the priests after Ralph Whittle were well supported even if the chantry foundation was never legally completed. One witness stated that Thomas Lewes had set his tenants to plough and sow the land at Stanley Hall, and there were rents from other property in Disley, as well as in Derbyshire and Lancashire. Deponents also described how the priests lived. Soon after 1548 one claimed that Thomas Lewes 'did byld a chamber at the old chapell', and in 1580 some

134 *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, v, p. 216.
138 PRO, E 134/21 & 22 Eliz./Mich. 6; E 134/22 Eliz./Trin. 8; E 321/36/7.
139 Also in PRO, E 321/26/88.
140 PRO, SC 6/Edw. VI/65, m. 4d.
141 PRO, E 321/36/7.
claimed that the priests had lived at the Dean House near the chapel.  

Most of the witnesses of 1579–80 were reticent in describing the chantry, but 80-year-old William Woodruff gave two individual and obviously nostalgic accounts of what it had been like before the suppression. He recalled that for most of the time, three priests and three deacons presided there and prayed for the dead who had left money to the chantry; that there was a song school and ‘the fereste service in the countrie’; he knew because he was so often there for mass and services. Every Sunday and holy day the benefactors’ names were read out from a bede roll a yard and a half long, and on the north wall of the chapel there was nailed up a brass plate on a wooden board, bearing the names of those who had given lands, rents, and other benefits.

After 1548, when the chantry priests were ‘thrown out’, and the bells, furnishings, and ornaments removed, only one priest lived at the chapel. Hugh Fowle and Lawrence Pinnington survived on an allowance from Sir Piers Legh VI, as did the curates or ministers who followed: Hamnet Legh, William Kay, and Thomas Gaitskell. In the year the Exchequer case began, Legh ensured that the allowance would be continued after his son’s marriage.

The appearance of the chapel and the form of services changed dramatically after the Reformation, and there was far greater stress on preaching. Many Elizabethan ministers were poorly educated and unprepared for this new role, but preaching seems to have been the forte of Disley’s curate Henry Sumner, who wrote and distributed sermons and expressed a desire to publish them, and was highly respected as a minister and a reformer. There is no evidence for his educational background, but he tutored the Legh children, bought religious texts for his master’s library, and was clearly a learned man.

The sources do not provide the same wealth of information about

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142 PRO, E 134/22 Eliz./Trin. 8.
143 PRO, E 134/22 Eliz./East. 2; E 134/22 Eliz./Trin. 8.
144 CCALS, P 69/4619/1.
146 JRULM, Legh of Lyme, Box R, no. B11.
his successor, Edward Creswell, who was also chaplain to the family. A couple of entries in the chapel register and a name in a list of contributors making loans and donations to the Crown give few clues other than to his presence. Sir Piers Legh VI, who obviously took a close interest in spiritual matters, must have selected a chaplain to suit his own religious views, so that Creswell was sure to have been a confirmed Protestant and a good preacher. The only surviving description of his character was given by William Bagshaw, ‘the Apostle of the Peak’, who as a child often heard ‘worthy Mr Cresswell’ preach, and described his home in Edale as ‘a dale or valley of vision’ in his time.

The diocesan records do not show when Samuel Bardsley was appointed to the cure, but his own letter of 1685 confirms that he took over about 1643. His remarkable incumbency lasted through the period of the Civil War, the Commonwealth, the Restoration, and the Glorious Revolution, a tribute perhaps to his adaptability, or at least to his desire to please everyone. In old age he found this more difficult. His letters reveal that after his stroke in 1685 he was unable to officiate at the church or visit Lyme Hall, and even when he returned to his duties he was obviously still weak. When Lady Legh stayed away from communion, it grieved him that he had offended her with his ‘affliction’. He even offered to retire from the living, but it seems that his patron permitted him to stay on, as he was still curate when he died in 1694. There is no evidence in the other sources searched to add to the information about services at Disley in Bardsley’s letters. Holy communion was offered at Easter and in October. There are also no indications of how Bardsley, who lived in his own house at Marple, coped on his small income.

Until this period even the basic diocesan sources for the incumbents remain quite inadequate. The first curate for whom nomination and testimonial papers survive is John Dearle, who was appointed in mid-1706 after what seems to have been a long

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149 Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 162; Earwaker, East Cheshire, ii, p. 98.
150 CCALS, P 69/1/1, s.a. 1630; ‘Loans, contributions, subsidies, and Ship Money paid by the clergy of the diocese of Chester [1620–39]’, ed. G. T. O. Bridgeman, in Miscellanies relating to Lancashire and Cheshire, i, RSLC, xii (1885), p. 103.
151 Earwaker, East Cheshire, ii, p. 98.
154 Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 162.
period with no perpetual curate. Dearie had been filling in at Disley for six months before he was nominated to the cure. Whether this had been the pattern since Bardsley's death is not known, but it seems likely from the evidence in the Legh correspondence. In May 1704 Mr Mallory—possibly an unlicensed curate—was dispatched to ask the curate at Macclesfield to officiate at Lyme or Disley on the next Sunday.

The sources relating to John Dearie's background and career are somewhat contradictory, but it seems that he had reached Disley via Cambridge and Macclesfield school, where he had been employed as usher from 1702. He probably kept his position at the school while serving Disley. He must have found that even the two positions together lacked a decent income, as he left the school in 1709, and by February 1710 was living in Stafford, from where he wrote to acquaint his former patron that he was settled 'in an agreeable place, where I have a Prospect of good Business', presumably as a private schoolteacher.

There is another gap in the sources before evidence of William Radmore's appointment. He had previously been a schoolmaster at Wrenbury in south Cheshire and brought his family to Disley, where he took on the school as well as the curacy in 1716. No nomination papers survive for him among the diocesan records, but the chapel register signals his arrival in Disley. The year after Radmore was appointed, the bishop of Chester issued a number of queries to all parishes and chapelries into the financial state of schools, charities, and church livings. Radmore's answers flatly stated that there was 'no settled income for the minister at Disley', and that voluntary contributions amounted altogether to about £25 a year. That the income was far less than he had been led to believe is made clear in his personal letter to Peter Legh VIII: 'the whole will fall short above

155 CCALS, EDP 104/1/1, letter, 1706.
156 Richards, _Old Cheshire churches_, p. 145, lists him as an incumbent c. 1701, but without citing any source. The bishop's act book covering 1686–1752 has not survived.
157 CCALS, EDP 104/1/1, testimonial, 1706; J. & J. A. Venn, _Alumni Cantabrigienses to 1751_ (4 vols, Cambridge, 1922–7), ii, p. 27.
159 Robson, _Education in Cheshire_, p. 106; Heginbotham, _Stockport_, ii, p. 162.
ten pounds of the thirty five which was offer’d me at my coming, and which I depended on.\textsuperscript{161} Some small sums of money left to the incumbent by members of the Gaskell family in the early eighteenth century made little difference to the financial position, and in any case disappeared in the 1820s on the bankruptcy of Col. Legh’s agent Thomas Claughton, who had held the capital sum from which the annual payments were made.\textsuperscript{162}

Radmore died in 1725,\textsuperscript{163} and the Revd J. Downes, who officiated at Disley before James Roe was appointed, combined this with duties at Stockport. In January 1727 he was attempting to negotiate a more favourable financial agreement, and a list of the salient points to be settled between him, the rector of Stockport, and Peter Legh VIII has survived among the Legh papers. To the patron it was important that Disley be adequately supplied: Downes was to be ‘att Stockport ev’ry other Sunday and no oftner’ and at Disley on the four sacrament days to administer communion. For this he could expect an income of £54 a year.\textsuperscript{164}

Material matters evidently occupied a great deal of the attention of an eighteenth-century curate struggling on an uncertain income. James Roe was no exception. He was the son of the vicar of Castleton in Derbyshire, and had little money of his own, his small fortune having been spent on his schooling and university education. When young he also had his orphaned brother and sister to support.\textsuperscript{165} His brother Charles started out in the silk trade and eventually became an extremely successful Macclesfield industrialist,\textsuperscript{166} but James had to make his own way in the church. Some of his letters survive in the Legh collection to show how he went about it.

Life in Disley was not always easy for him. When appointed at the age of twenty-two in 1733, he had been promised £30 a year by Peter

\textsuperscript{161} JRULM, Legh of Lyme Corr., Radmore to Legh, 2 Apr. 1717.
\textsuperscript{162} Thirty-first Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire Concerning Charities, pp. 518, 558–59, Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons (1837–8) 103, xxiv.
\textsuperscript{163} Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{164} JRULM, Legh of Lyme, Box T, no. C6, letter from Downes and memorandum, 1727.
\textsuperscript{165} CCALS, EDP 104/1/1, Roe, 1733.
Legh VIII,\footnote{CCALS, EDP 104/1/1, Roe, 1733.} to which was added the usual amount from Stockport, surplice fees and other contributions, and after 1740 an augmentation from Queen Anne’s Bounty. In 1752, with pew rents included, the living would have been worth £60, but when he attempted that year to appropriate the pew rents, as his predecessor Downes had apparently done, he met with local resistance. A group of Disley inhabitants petitioned Peter Legh IX against their curate. The letter to his patron about this matter suggests that there had been earlier unpleasantness between himself, the Leghs, and the congregation.\footnote{JRULM, Legh of Lyme Corr., Roe to Legh, 20 Aug. 1752.} It took time, too, for Roe to persuade his patron that he must take a second cure at Macclesfield (where he seems to have lived throughout) in 1756, in order to secure his family’s future. He eventually succeeded, and was the first incumbent to employ a stipendiary curate at Disley.

Diocesan records are much more complete from the mid-eighteenth century and allow the rather transient assistant curates who served at Disley to be identified. For Bartholomew Booth, the first candidate,\footnote{JRULM, Legh of Lyme Corr., Roe to Legh, 20 Aug. 1752.} there is also the evidence in James Roe’s letters to Peter Legh IX concerning his employment. Roe considered Booth a very promising, sensible young man, likely to be ‘highly agreeable to the People’ and since he was keen to take on the schoolmaster’s position as well, considered that his appointment would be an opportunity for doing the neighbourhood ‘a singular service’.\footnote{JRULM, Legh of Lyme Corr., Roe to Legh, 17, 20 Mar. 1756.} Unfortunately, while Roe waited for his patron’s approval, Booth accepted a curacy at Wilmslow, and it was midsummer of that year before he could honourably move to Disley. He left under a cloud in June 1760,\footnote{Ibid., Roe to Legh, 29 Mar. 1756; 11 Feb. 1760; CCALS, EDP 104/1/1, Booth, 1758.} but stayed on longer at the school, later achieving considerable success running his own private academies in Liverpool and America.\footnote{M. Whitehead, The Academies of the Reverend Bartholomew Booth in Georgian England and Revolutionary America (Lewiston, ME, 1996); CCALS, EDA 1/6, ff. 54v., 64.} Diocesan records identify the three curates who followed him in quick succession, each staying only a year or two and paid, like Booth, £30 a year plus surplice fees and pew rents.\footnote{CCALS, EDP 104/1/1.}
Disley church was still catering for a small rural community; in 1754 there were only 135 families—a total of 576 people—in the township.\footnote{Heginbotham, \textit{Stockport}, ii, pp. 86–7.} The surviving chapelwardens’ accounts, which begin while Booth was at Disley, are the only evidence found so far of the everyday aspects of church life there in the mid-eighteenth century.\footnote{CCALS, P 69/11/1.} As well as the routine costs of washing the surplice, Almanacs, parchment for the parish clerk, bread for the sacrament, and besoms for cleaning the church, there was recorded a payment of 2s. ‘spent with the Pastor and . . . Mr Booth when he setled’ in 1760, and other money spent on singers who visited from neighbouring Taxal parish in 1761 and from Chapel-en-le-Frith in 1769. The practice of having singers and musicians to accompany services grew rapidly in the eighteenth century, but Disley does not seem to have had its own musicians until the nineteenth century. Purchases of oil and soap for the bells, and the 19s. 6d. paid to the bell-ringers every year attest to the importance of bell-ringing in this community. In 1762 the accounts chronicle an extra payment of 12s. for Coronation Day—they must have been ringing day and night to be paid that amount—but it was not until the 1790s that their yearly payment rose to two, then to three guineas.\footnote{Cf. Bettey, \textit{Church and Parish}, pp. 117, 121.}

By then James Roe was long dead, and George Barbor had been Disley’s resident incumbent for thirty years.\footnote{CCALS, EDA 1/7, f. 52; EDP 104/1/1, Barbor, 1765.} Two episcopal enquiries completed by him survive in the diocesan records and provide a snapshot view of the township just before the arrival of the Peak canal and the cotton mills changed it for ever. His answers were similar for each, brief and to the point—perhaps even dismissive—but it is clear that Disley was still a quiet rural township, and that the Leghs were the only family of note who attended the chapel.\footnote{CCALS, EDV 7/1/107; EDV 7/2/112.}

Barbor’s income was much as previously, the largest portion still a gratuity from the patron. Divine service was performed twice every Sunday, and the sacrament celebrated seven or eight times a year for about thirty communicants. Any challenge to the established church in Disley which may have begun while he was incumbent is certainly not evident in these returns. His claim that there were no papists in the chapelry is supported by later evidence,\footnote{179} and he seemed
untroubled by the few Methodists who lived there. The account of
the resident curate two decades later suggests that Barbor’s state­
ment that there were no ‘absenters from public worship’ may have
been an exaggeration, but he was obviously not willing to be
troubled by any unrest or change to the status quo in the 1770s
and 1780s. The steady pattern of eighteenth-century rural life began
to be disrupted in the next decade.

The nineteenth century

Nineteenth-century sources are far more numerous and detailed
than for previous centuries, and it has proved impossible to
investigate them all for this study. Most of Disley’s surviving
ecclesiastical sources begin then, and even they alone are too
voluminous to search completely. Besides the chapel registers and
chapelwardens’ accounts which continue from the previous century
were a whole new range of sources generated by the clergy and
church officers, or received from outside agencies and kept by them,
including vestry minutes, registers of services, Sunday School
minutes, printed reports, a chapel magazine, pamphlets, corres­
pondence and papers relating to the chapel and the burial ground,
plans for the development of Furness Vale as a separate district, and
a scrapbook.180 Local newspapers started printing detailed local news
about church activities, and for the three years 1869–71 Stockport
Parish Parish Magazine covered all the churches in its townships.181
The records of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who from 1835 con­
trolled the augmentation of poor livings, the purchase of church
land, and the creation of new parishes, include several files relating
to Disley.182 Among the diocesan records, the act books, subscrip­
tion books, ordination papers, and parish bundles concerning clergy
all supply information on Disley’s curates.183 The articles of enquiry
prior to visitation are an especially valuable source, chiefly because
of the character of the clergyman who completed them in 1805 and
1811, William Marriott.184

179 CCALS, EDV 7/3/158; EDV 7/4/76.
180 CCALS, typescript catalogue for class P 69.
181 Copies at CCALS, P 14/3435/12/1.
182 CoF Rec. Centre, EC 28558, 39785, 51767, 83585.
183 CCALS, EDA 1/9–16; EDA 4; EDA 5; EDP 104/1/1–2.
184 CCALS, EDV 7/3/158; EDV 7/4/76; later replies in EDV 7/6/306 (1821); EDV 7/7/170 (1825).
At the opening of the century a new incumbent was appointed to Disley. There was no surprise in the nomination of George Heron, the son of one of the trustees of the Legh estate. He was instituted as vicar of Middlewich in 1797 and added Disley in 1799, but was never resident.\footnote{CCALS, EDA 1/9, ff. 42v., 63, 92v.; EDP 104/1/1, Heron, 1799, 1808; Ormerod, History, i, p. 741; cf. CCALS, EDV 7/4/76.} The Revd Hay, who had come to Disley in 1798 as an assistant curate when George Barbor was very old, and who initially received the paltry sum of £20 a year, was possibly still there for a while under Heron.\footnote{CCALS, EDA 1/9, ff. 77v., 78v.} William Marriott followed him after Disley had been left unsupplied for a year.\footnote{CCALS, EDA 1/9, f. 152v.; EDP 104/1/1, Marriott, 1804.} Marriott had been a schoolmaster and as an older man had a reputation as a classical scholar,\footnote{Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, pp. 162–63.} but his intention had always been to enter the church, and in May 1805 he took over as assistant curate at Disley on a stipend of £50 a year. Four months later he applied to be ordained.\footnote{CCALS, EDA 1/9, f. 152v.; EDP 104/1/1, Marriott, 1804–5.} In November 1805 the new curate completed his first reply to the bishop prior to visitation. Like his chapel register entries and correspondence,\footnote{CCALS, P 69/1/2; P 69/2/1; EDP 104/1/1.} the returns which he submitted were long and incredibly detailed, suggesting a perfectionist, initially full of high ideals about his role as a minister. When his book about the locality, *The Antiquities of Lyme*, was poorly received, he was so annoyed that he bought and collected all the copies he could and burnt them.\footnote{Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 162.}

Marriott’s reply in 1805 reveals more about the township and the changing role of the established church than any other single source.\footnote{CCALS, EDV 7/3/158.} Since the end of the previous century Disley had been undergoing great changes. From the time that the first cotton mills were built at the Furness Vale end of the township in the 1790s, the population grew rapidly, and by 1805 there were 277 houses occupied by 1,348 people, over twice the number of fifty years earlier. Home-based manufacturing of woollens was being steadily replaced by mill-based cotton manufacturing.\footnote{The history of Disley in flowers (1990), p. 7 (copy in CCALS, P 69/4429/1); From canals to computers, pp. 18–21; A. Calladine & J. Fricker, East Cheshire textile mills (London, 1993), esp. pp. 4–15, 106; D. Brunhead, ‘The early cotton industry in New Mills, Derbyshire’, Manchester Region History Review, xi (1996), p. 24.} The construction of
the Peak Forest Canal about nine years before had also brought a number of Irish 'navvies' into the district and some had stayed on to cut the new turnpike road. Like the mill-hands, they were strangers to Disley, transient workers who in Marriott's words were 'without the ties which bind men to religious observance on Sunday'. In his opinion they had been a bad influence in the village, particularly during the year that the chapel was unsupplied. Although the chapel, which could hold 200 'comfortably', was well attended, there were at least 140 families in which one or more (sometimes all) were 'inattentive to the Lord's Day'.

Being new to the church, Marriott still held out hope for the backsliders. He preached two sermons every Sunday and administered communion six times a year, initially to twenty-three people. The chapelwardens' accounts reveal that musicians had been introduced at his services.\(^{194}\) He threw himself into catechizing the children and young people every Sunday evening in the warmer weather. At first the numbers were low, but later seventy or eighty poor children came, and he took to distributing books of explanation and small catechisms, from a fund he raised 'by sermon'. He also gave out spelling books in the hope that parents would send the children to school.\(^{195}\) At that time the only school in Disley was the Leghs' charity school.

Marriott's next reply to the bishop's enquiries, in 1811, reveals the difficulties which he was facing in the indifference of his parishioners and the growing strength of Dissent.\(^{196}\) It was clear that much had happened to disillusion him in the intervening years. By this time he had succeeded Heron as perpetual curate,\(^{197}\) and knew the township and its people all too well. Of all Disley's inhabitants Marriott counted no more than a dozen interested in promoting religion and order; the others attended church only out of 'religious sentiment'. The number who, despite his efforts, spent their Sundays in the public houses and around the streets, concerned him. In that same year the sentencing of a Disley man to transportation inspired him to preach and publish a sermon on the evils of the ways which he had observed at Disley.\(^{198}\) He estimated that half the population still

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194 CCALS, P 69/11/1, s.a. 1811.
195 CCALS, EDV 7/4/76.
196 CCALS, EDV 7/4/76.
197 CCALS, EDA 1/10, ff. 14v-15.
absented themselves from church. Among them he counted the Roman Catholics. As a 'public body' they had been unknown in Disley since the mid-eighteenth century, and even then there had only ever been a tiny number.199 Now there were some among the large number of printing-works hands, originally from Ireland and north Lancashire, who moved in and out of the district, working at mills along the River Goyt, but they were far from religious and did not appear to attend mass or attempt to convert their wives or children if they married local women. The nearest Catholic churches were some distance away at Glossop, Macclesfield, and Edgeley.

Nonconformity in Disley was entirely another matter. Old Dissent had been very weak,200 but there was a real threat from the Methodists, who had gained greatly in strength since Mr Heald, a zealous Methodist with Stockport connections, had taken over Waterside Mill three years before. Other Methodist non-attenders lived at Furness Vale, on the edge of Disley township nearly two miles from the church, and attended a chapel at Whaley Bridge. Altogether Marriott counted 132 Methodists in Disley township, whereas six years earlier there had been only 40; a meeting room had been built closer to the village, and a Sunday School had just opened 'to exert a hold upon the rising generation'. He had less complaint to make about the 'ancient' Methodists in Disley, or the moderate ones, some of whom had their children baptised at his church and attended communion. From them he received 'great respect', but not from the zealots who wanted to convert the village. It was therefore imperative that a church Sunday School be opened. Help had already been promised from Lyme, and he intended to restart the catechism classes which he had taught as an enthusiastic young curate.

The National Day and Sunday schools were finally erected by Thomas Legh in 1825,201 but by the time the new building opened William Marriott had tired of ministry and rarely officiated, appointing successive curates to carry out his duties and instead spending his days among his books and manuscripts with his friends the Heginbothams in Stockport.202 James Sumner, who arrived in December 1824, was paid a stipend of £60 out of the £120 that the

199 Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 87; CCALS, EDA 6/2/36; EDA 6/2/41; EDA 6/5.
200 Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 87; CCALS, EDV 7/3/158.
201 McCaldon, Disley remembered; Earwaker, East Cheshire, ii, p. 101.
202 Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 163.
living was then worth and which was sequestered from the absent Marriott.\textsuperscript{203} William Greswell replaced him in 1829, and was curate until Marriott's death in 1839.\textsuperscript{204} Roger Kent was the next curate. He stayed only six years, resigning in 1845 to become private chaplain to Lord Combermere,\textsuperscript{205} and was followed by Brabazon Lowther, who married Ellen, the daughter of Thomas Legh of Lyme, and resigned barely a year after his appointment.\textsuperscript{206}

Despite a general slump in the cotton industry in the 1820s, Disley's mills flourished in the 1830s, and the population continued to grow.\textsuperscript{207} Other sources of employment included coal mines, brickworks, and quarries. By 1851 there were over 2,000 people living there, more than twice the number at the beginning of the century.\textsuperscript{208} As in churches all over Britain, clergy and congregation tried to keep pace with the increasing population. In the 1820s and 1830s the church was enlarged, and an extension was made to the Sunday School in 1834 by members of the Orford family.

Records survive of the progress of the Sunday schools, which catered for several hundred children. While the Orfords lived, annual subscriptions were made by all or most of the major businesses in Disley and neighbourhood, including Mr Vickers of the Waterside Mill, and the owner of Strines Calico Printing Co. After the Orfords both died, there was a noticeable falling off, and in 1858–9 the amount received was only half of that ten years earlier. The Orfords left an endowment to the Sunday School, but initially it appears that there was strife over how the fund should be managed, which was finally settled in court. In the 1850s and 1860s, £520 was invested for the fund and the income was spent on singers and book prizes.\textsuperscript{209}

In 1847 Noble Wilson was appointed to Disley. He was already over fifty when he came and died while serving there.\textsuperscript{210} He was

\textsuperscript{203} CCALS, EDP 104/1/1, 1823–4; EDA 1/10, ff. 210v.-211.
\textsuperscript{204} CCALS, EDP 104/1/1, 1829; EDA 1/11, f. 64; Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{205} CCALS, EDA 1/12, ff. 146v., 148; EDP 104/1/2; Earwaker, East Cheshire, ii, p. 99; Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 163.
\textsuperscript{206} CCALS, EDP 104/1/2; C. Lewis & R. Kemsley, Shrigley Hall and its owners (privately printed, [1998]: copy in CCALS), pp. 12–13.
\textsuperscript{207} Calladine & Fricker, East Cheshire textile mills, pp. 106–7.
\textsuperscript{208} Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 87.
\textsuperscript{209} CCALS, P 69/14/45–51; P 69/4727/9.
\textsuperscript{210} Heginbotham, Stockport, ii, p. 163.
succeeded in 1859 by Charles Satterthwaite, who had been curate of Marple for two years before his appointment.\textsuperscript{211} He proved to be the longest ever serving curate at Disley, dying after fifty-one years as incumbent, and for his period at Disley there is a wealth of material about church life. Particularly useful are the annual returns which he provided for the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the bishop, and the register of services and memoranda about church matters which he kept in the latter part of the century.\textsuperscript{212} For three years he wrote a monthly contribution on Disley for the \textit{Stockport Parish Magazine}, and while these were hardly controversial (unlike those from some of the other chapels) they give an excellent picture of the events which marked the church year.\textsuperscript{213}

Satterthwaite's main preoccupations as his incumbency wore on were coping with the increased workload in a place with a continuously growing population which was effectively split into two parts at opposite ends of the township. The continued growth of the township in the Furness Vale and Newtown area, where it adjoined New Mills and where industry was concentrated, required that he attempt to cater for a large working-class population. Various augmentations of the living since the end of the eighteenth century had improved the perpetual curate's financial situation, so his efforts to augment the living further through the Ecclesiastical Commissioners' funds were aimed at supporting an assistant curate. When he first applied in 1863, his income was £149 18s 6d. At first refused, he succeeded in 1873 in obtaining a grant of £20 a year from a fund for places with large numbers of miners,\textsuperscript{214} and was able to appoint an assistant curate to take services at the mission room which had been opened at Furness Vale. By then the population of the whole township was over 2,800 people and increasing yearly.

In the late 1890s Satterthwaite attempted to have Furness Vale assigned as a separate provisional district, and to alter its boundaries so that the whole of the settlement, which included a portion in neighbouring Taxal parish, could have its own church to replace the mission room.\textsuperscript{215} His correspondence reveals the resistance which met his attempts to change the status quo. The bishop was in

\textsuperscript{211} CCALS, EDP 104/1/2.
\textsuperscript{212} CofE Rec. Centre, EC 28558; CCALS, P 69/3336/4/1.
\textsuperscript{213} Copies at CCALS, P 14/3435/12/1.
\textsuperscript{214} CofE Rec. Centre, EC 28558.
\textsuperscript{215} CCALS, P 69/3336/4/1, July 1899.
complete agreement, but the Revd Evans at Taxal, always a difficult man to deal with, proved intractable and the scheme foundered. The most that Satterthwaite could achieve was to gain informal ‘running powers’ over the people in Furness Vale who belonged to Taxal parish. A newspaper report five years later is an excellent source of information on the history of the ‘complicated ecclesiastical position’ at Furness Vale. At that stage a church within the bounds of Disley parish was planned for the settlement, and it was finally built as a daughter church in 1912, just before Disley was finally upgraded to parochial status in 1913. Sadly Satterthwaite had already died in 1910, before witnessing either of the events which he had worked to achieve.

Disley’s long journey from private chantry to parochial chapel to parish church was not unique. Throughout the large ancient parishes of the north of England especially, the writing of local church history is complicated by the existence of similar chapels which achieved full parochial standing only late in the day. Their earlier position was commonly idiosyncratic and for long periods they were only ever documented in unsystematic ways. Historians who try to apply the familiar methods of research into parish churches will often be disappointed. Their documentation represents a challenge to archivists too, since their archives are inevitably lop-sided and incomplete in comparison with those of parish churches. But, as the example of Disley shows, the chapelries are not undocumented by any means, and wide-ranging searches into the sources for their history can bring to light unexpected treasures which are full of interest not just for ecclesiastical history but for social history too.

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216 CCALS, P 69/3336/6/2–5.
217 CCALS, P 69/3336/4/1, cutting from the Reporter, 7 Jan. 1905.
218 Disley Parish Magazine, July 1911 (copy at CCALS, P 69/5252/8); CCALS, P 69/19/1–7; P 69/3336/9; CofE Rec. Centre, EC 51767.
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