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BAPTISTS AT LATIMER'S BIRTHPLACE

WHEN in 1864 the *General Baptist Magazine* wanted to inspire its readers with a series on Leicestershire preachers, it began with Hugh Latimer. Latimer (c.1485-1555) was born and grew up at Thurcaston, 4½ miles northwest of Leicester, and Latimer is still the village's one claim to fame. Two houses have been suggested as his birthplace. One was demolished earlier this century,¹ the other still stands as Latymer House. It consists of a cruck cottage built before Latimer's day, and a larger wing of 1568.² At the other end is attached a smithy, now an upholsterer's workshop.

For much of the nineteenth century this house was occupied by the village blacksmith, John Lygo.³ He licensed his home in 1828 to allow for public worship,⁴ so that next year 37 to 47 people attended General Baptist services in a picturesque and historic setting.⁵ Rothley General Baptist church the same year reported, "We have occasional preaching at Thurcaston, Cropston, and Ratcliff[-on-the-Wreake]."⁶

By the time of the 1851 census John Lygo's services had ended, although he had many more years as "blacksmith and shopkeeper"⁷ in Thurcaston. A disruption of the Rothley church in 1850 occurred when they dispensed with the services of their pastor since 1846, W. Goodliffe.⁸ Those who still wanted him, and not a system of supply preachers, left and set up services and a Sunday school in a rented house in Cropston, a hamlet between Thurcaston and Rothley which had no place of worship of its own.⁹ John Lygo did not apparently share in these proceedings; but the services in Latymer House did not survive them. The Cropston work not far away built its present chapel in 1879, and ceased to be affiliated to the New Connexion or any other denomination.

The Elizabethan wing of Latymer House has, close to the street, a well-lit downstairs room with evidence of two doorways to the outside, quite apart from the main entrance to the whole house. Capable of holding nearly fifty people, it would have been suitable for public services. And long after Baptist preachers had stopped calling, the Lygos put this room to forward-looking usefulness for the community, for tradition¹⁰ tells of 'Grandmother Lygo' living here and letting this room be used for a village reading-room supplied with the latest newspapers and free for all.

NOTES

¹ J. B. Firth, *Highways and Byways in Leicestershire*, 396, London 1926.

² N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Leicestershire and Rutland*, 252, Penguin Books, 1960.

³ *General Baptist Magazine*, March 1864, 94.

⁴ Leicestershire Record Office, QC 44/1/2.

⁵ *Ibid.*, QS 95/2/1.93.

⁶ *Minutes of the New Connexion of General Baptists*, 1829, 24.

⁷ W. White, *History, Gazetteer, and Directory of the Counties of Leicester and Rutland*, 621, Sheffield 1877.

⁸ *Minutes of the New Connexion*, 1847, 27.

⁹ Cropston Chapel Sunday School Book, 1f.

¹⁰ Information from Mr. G. Sedgwick, present owner of Latymer House, who kindly showed me over the house.

ALAN BETTERIDGE.