

Following on from discovering valued information on John Warburton's connections with our local area, I have been finding out more about William Gadsby who baptized John Warburton and who was instrumental in establishing him into the ministry.

William Gadsby is known mainly today for his hymn writing, but William Gadsby was not only a hymnwriter but a godly, tireless and faithful minister of the Gospel and spent the most of his ministry pastoring a church in Manchester. It thrills me to read about his exploits, especially in the Lancashire area. To read of him preaching in Bury, Rochdale, Rawtenstall, Goodshaw (remember our time in Crawshawbooth, the next village to Goodshaw) and other local towns and villages, places where we have also ministered, is somewhat humbling and at the same time encouraging.

Goodshaw, Rossendale Valley.

B.A. Ramsbottom has written an excellent book on the life of Gadsby and I would like to share some extracts from his book which members of Trinity Grace Church and Charlesworth will find really interesting. Writing about William Gadsby and his itinerant ministry in this area he writes:

'Here and there he went, week by week, often on foot. Incidents like the following were well remembered nearly fifty years later: One morning in Whit week, after preaching the previous evening in the Rossendale valley, William Gadsby went with a friend to catch the Bury coach – but it was full of people travelling to the Manchester races. Unmoved, William Gadsby took off his coat and neckerchief, and trudged the twelve miles to Bury. The day was oppressively hot, but after dining he started off again by foot the further nine miles to Manchester, where he arrived at last covered with perspiration and dust.'

The coach, in this instance, would have been one pulled by horses. There were no roads as such in the early 1800's. For Gadsby to have walked from the Rossendale valley to Manchester would have entailed him walking through the valley of Ramsbottom, the industrial town of Ramsbottom as we know it now did not exist then. It is highly likely that he would have used the pack horse road that takes you through Holcombe Brook, down Pot Green, through Summerseat and on to Bury; just a thought.

Little Harwood, Accrington.

William Gadsby helped many small groups of Christians to form a local church. One such instance mentioned was in Little Harwood near Accrington, Ramsbottom writes:

‘The day of baptizing was one of the most remarkable in William Gadsby’s life. It was the second Lord’s day in November 1819 (exactly 200 years ago next month) and the place appointed for the baptizing was a field in Little Harwood. When they arrived for the services, a rough crowd of several thousand had gathered to make mockery of the proceedings. There they were indulging in all kind of noisy merriment. It seemed an impossibility that the service could continue. What was to happen?’

William Gadsby ascended a little knoll in the field and called out, “In the name of the Lord God of Israel, I command silence.” One of those who was baptized that day said that it was as if an electric shock went through the multitude. All was silent – and the ordinance was administered in peace and quietness. Surely this was more than natural eloquence; rather the divine power of the Spirit of God.

One of those baptized was Joseph Hanson who had been converted through the preaching of Gadsby and for the next fifty years served as a deacon at Ebenezer Chapel, Accrington.

Charlesworth.

When all gravestones were removed from Rusholme Cemetery where William Gadsby was buried, his gravestone was taken to Charlesworth burial ground, where it can still be seen. The reason for the close connection of Gadsby to Charlesworth is recorded in Ramsbottom’s book:

‘It has been mentioned that William Gadsby was used by God to establish about forty places of truth. One such was Charlesworth, high in the Derbyshire hills – not too far distant from Manchester.

Here lived a farm labourer named Squire Booth who with his friend George Mellor would go miles to hear the truth. Squire could not read, so George taught him – and soon he began to preach to a few in his own house. Then as numbers grew, they hired a loom shop. Still the congregation increased. Of course, such happenings as this would interest William Gadsby, especially as they had been to Stockport to hear his friend Hanforth preach.

Eventually William Gadsby came, preached in a barn, next day baptized four, including Squire and George, and a church was formed. That was in October 1816.

Squire Booth’s labours were much honoured of God, and there was much prosperity in the years that followed. When at last a chapel was built in 1837,

William Gadsby preached at the opening. This chapel still continues as a Strict Baptist chapel.'

I don't know about you, but I find these accounts of the work of God in times past, especially in our local area, fascinating. God began a work two hundred years ago using an illiterate country farmer which, through the help friends in Ramsbottom and other likeminded churches, continues to bear witness to the truth today. May it encourage us all to continue to be faithful in our service for our Master.