

Bunyan Birthplace Memorial Stone Unveiled



On an unknown day in 1628 a baby was born in a cottage which stood near a stream in a Harrowden field. Living in their humble, thatched-roof cottage, with its high chimneys, tiny windows and low front porch, the parents of that baby, Thomas and Margaret Bunyan, would have been surprised indeed if they could have foreseen the future of their son John.

On Saturday, in that self-same field a group of people saw the unveiling of a stone to mark the site of John Bunyan's birthplace, which has long-since disappeared.

The unveiling took place during a service conducted by the Rev. J. W. Alexander, Bunyan Meeting Minister, and included Bunyan's own hymn, "Who would true valour see". Scripture readings were given by the Mayor of Bedford (Ald. R. Turner).

In a short address, Mr. Alexander said that Bunyan, standing at the cottage door, saw the same prospect of green fields and the distant tower of Elstow Church as his listeners could see. It was in those fields that he had walked and dreamed some of his dreams.

Mr. Alexander then paid tribute to those who had responded to the appeal for funds to erect the stone and to others who had given their assistance. He mentioned particularly Major Simon Whitbread, D.L., owner of the land, who had permitted the stone to be placed there; farmers who had given access to the site; Mr. H. Garlick and his men who had fashioned the stone; Mr. Ralph Porter, Sir Thomas Keens, former Chairman of Bedfordshire County Council, and Ald. R. Turner. Mr. Alexander said that the track was not a right-of-way but was for genuine pilgrims.

APPROPRIATE MEMORIAL

Unveiling the stone, Sir Thomas Keens recalled last year's renovation of the Moot Hall at Elstow. It was only appropriate, he said, that the work should be completed by marking Bunyan's birthplace. After unveiling the stone, Sir Thomas read its inscription, "This stone was erected in the Festival of Britain year to mark the birthplace of John Bunyan 1628 - 1688", adding, "To his eternal memory and to the Glory of God".

The granite stone was ready for unveiling last year but owing to inclement weather the ceremony had to be postponed. This explains the reference to "Festival of Britain year" in the inscription.

The appeal for funds to erect the stone was first made last year in a letter signed by Sir Thomas, Ald. Turner, and Mr. Alexander, in the columns of this newspaper. Thanks to the generosity of our readers and members of Bunyan Meeting, helped by a contribution of £25 from Bedfordshire County Council, the appeal was successful.

Gathered round the stone after the unveiling ceremony are (left to right): The Rev. J. W. Alexander, Ald. R. Turner, Sir Thomas Keens, Ald. F. W. Braybrooks, and Ald. E. Street.