

*This is the eighteenth of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church*

### **WHO WAS HENRY AINSWORTH?**

Until about two years ago, although I knew that Ainsworth Close was named after a historical figure who had some sort of connection with the village, I had no idea who he was. It was not until I started to do some research on him as part of the Lincoln Festival Exhibition that I uncovered his fascinating story. He was the son of a yeoman, called Thomas Ainsworth, and he was baptised in Swanton Morley on 15 January 1570. There are several other Ainsworths in the Parish Register around that time, but they are rather hard to disentangle. However, it looks as though he had two older sisters.

When he was seventeen years old, he went up to Cambridge University and for his first year he was a scholar at St John's College, where his tutor was a Ralph Furness. He then transferred to Gonville and Caius College. His tutor there was Stephen Perse, who later founded the Perse School at Cambridge. Now at that time Cambridge University was still riven with religious conflicts. The Church of England, which had been established in the reign of Henry VIII, and which had endured the short Protestant reign of Edward VI and the even shorter Catholic reign of Mary I, was trying to find some sort of uniformity under Elizabeth I. But at the University various sorts of Nonconformist groups were emerging. These were led by followers of Thomas Cartwright, the Professor of Divinity. He himself wanted to remain within the Church of England and to reform it to his way of thinking, but others were Separatists and wanted to break away completely from the established church. It was to this last group that Ainsworth became attracted, and it could be that it was because of these beliefs that he left Cambridge in early 1590 without taking his degree.

But these were dangerous waters, for in 1559 Elizabeth had issued a new *Act of Uniformity* which made it a legal obligation to go to church every Sunday and to use the revised Book of Common Prayer. The Nonconformists were forced to flee to Holland. Strangely enough, there were two English Churches with very different ideas established at Middelburg by 1582. Thomas Cartwright had joined the Merchant Adventurers' Church, which he still regarded as being part of the Church of England. The Separatist group that was founded in Norwich by Robert Browne had also fled to Middelburg to found their own Church. Back in England, Henry Barrow and John Greenwood who had founded a Separatist group in London were still in gaol, although they did manage to smuggle their writings out to Holland to be published.

Ainsworth was a brilliant scholar and teacher, but he was not a strong character and the next few years saw him wavering between propounding his Separatist beliefs and appearing to conform by attending the services of the Established Church. In the end, however, in about 1595 he was forced to flee to Amsterdam where he lived in considerable poverty for a couple of years.

We now meet a character who was to have a tremendous influence on Ainsworth's life in Holland. His name was Francis Johnson. He was yet another Cambridge Fellow, and a follower of Thomas Cartwright. He too was exiled to Holland and he became pastor of the Merchant Adventurers' Church in 1590. He was a fervent anti-Separatist and helped the authorities track down their secret printing presses. He found one such press at Dort and he enthusiastically set about burning Barrow and Greenwood's books. But he also started to read them, and he eventually became converted to Separatism. This meant that he had to leave the Merchant Adventurers' Church, and in 1592 he returned to England, where he became pastor to Barrow and Greenwood's group. However they were both hanged in April 1593, and he was put in prison. The rest of the group fled to Holland and eventually ended up in Amsterdam.

They were leaderless, but they struggled on. Then Ainsworth joined them and was almost immediately elected as their 'teacher'. Not long after that Johnson was released from prison and rejoined the group as their pastor.

Next time I shall tell you the story of their life in Amsterdam and of Ainsworth's Book of Psalms which went out to America on the *Mayflower* with the Pilgrim Fathers.