

The Old School House, East Lane



Near the top of East Lane, as you approach Elm Tree Square is an interesting looking double-fronted house, No 4 East Lane, which some locals know as the Old School House, while others know it as the Old Tithe Barn. So which is it? Both are correct.

After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539 most the lands and buildings belonging to Bolton Priory were sold to the Clifford family, but the right to collect the tithes in Skipton parish was purchased by Christ Church college in Oxford. This gave the college the right to appoint the vicars of Skipton. At that time Embsay and Eastby, as formerly part of the Priory estates, were both townships within Skipton parish.

Embsay had its own tithe barn where tithes which were paid in kind were collected and stored before being sent to Christ Church college. This tithe barn stood on the site where the 'Old School House' now stands on East Lane. Some fascinating documents relating to both these buildings can be found in the Christ Church college archives in Oxford.

The tithe barn was described in 1849 as standing "*in a line with cottage-houses, and its two ends appear to form the gables of two cottages – it is about 54 ft long by 28 ft wide. There is no ground behind it. There is a small space about 10 feet wide between the Barn and the public road.*" By this time the barn was being rented out as storage space for a timber merchant and joiner Richard Hull, all tithes having been converted into cash payments a couple of years previously.

In the 1840s and 1850s the Church of England launched a nationwide church building programme in an attempt to meet the challenge posed by the rise of non-conformism. In March 1849 the vicar of Skipton Rev Phillip Chabert Kidd, was given copies of 2 years' worth of extensive correspondence sent by J.B. Sidgwick of Embsay Kirk to the Dean and Chapter of Christ Church college who still had control of the tithe barn and the vicar of Skipton's living. For several years Sidgwick had pressured them to build a new church in

Embsay and convert the tithe barn into accommodation for the school master of the school run by the curate. The matter was to be taken seriously, he declared, as this was a “*village where dissent of all kinds flourishes and there are three regular meeting houses to entrap the unwary and the careless into dissent.*”

When Sidgwick moved away from Embsay, Rev Kidd took over the campaign, stating that the situation in Embsay and Eastby was increasingly desperate:

“*The Township has hitherto been a prey to every kind of Dissent,*” he wrote. His curate, Charles Spackman, had worked hard to establish a school in 1847, recruiting 150 children, as well as running evening classes for adults. But the lack of a place for Anglican worship in the village was undermining his efforts to woo the locals away from the non-conformist chapels. In the meantime Anglican services had been held in hired rooms, and later in the new school rooms. Only one pew at Holy Trinity Church in Skipton was reserved for the people of Embsay-with-Eastby, and even that was the subject of an ongoing dispute.

At last in 1850 Christ Church college agreed to allow a new church to be built and for the tithe barn to be used as homes for the school master and mistress of the Church school, provided enough funds could be raised locally. Despite “*very strong opposition*” from the Swedenborgians and Methodists, Rev Kidd was undeterred.

In a campaign leaflet he quoted Galatians VI, 2: “*Bear ye one another’s burdens*” as a rallying cry to Anglicans in Craven to contribute to the combat against the “*spiritual destitution of the parish of Skipton*”. He railed against “*Swedenborgianism, and other species of Dissent*”, but hoped it wasn’t too late, so that the population could still be “*recovered from the ranks of Dissent*” in what he called “*the less favoured portion of the Lord’s vineyard*”. £100 had already been raised for the School Master’s house, but £300 more was needed.

By 1857 the tithe barn had been demolished and the present building put in its place – it is double fronted because the single entrance door led into two separate wings – one for the schoolmaster and the other for the schoolmistress. It is interesting that the architectural style echoes a much older form, particularly in the use of 17th Century-style driphoods over the windows, and the decorative cross-crosslet on a shield, perhaps as a reminder of the building that had stood there before.

Thankfully, the Non-conformists and Anglicans of Embsay and Eastby are on much friendlier terms these days!

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