

ADDERLEY CHURCH, four miles from Market Drayton, sticks out like a sore thumb—out from the pleasant pastoral Shropshire landscape and out into the direct line of the Audlem road, which has to curve violently round the warehouse-like building.

"A horrible-looking thing," said a local farmhand to whom I had given a lift. Probably the ugliest church I have ever seen was my assessment.

To be fair, we were only laymen. Nikolaus Pevsner, authority on architecture, writes of Adderley Church: "Its date is 1712-13 and it represents that style worthily."

Still, in my view, it certainly is not worth fighting about today. But fight about it they did, more than 300 years ago, before its reconstruction.

Just across the churchyard wall is Adderley Park and, beyond it, Shavington. In 1506, a Cheshire family, the Needhams, acquired Shavington Hall, becoming neighbours to the Corbets of Adderley.

Illegal

Under Queen Elizabeth, worship in the private chapel at Shavington became illegal, so the Needhams began attending Adderley Church, which they reached by a short cut through Adderley Park.

The Corbets, as patrons of the living, had their pew in the chancel, as had also the vicar. He rescued the Needhams from the indignity of sitting in the nave by granting them his pew—until he married.

Then, in deference to his wife, he moved back into his pew, relegating the Needhams again to the nave.

Sir Robert Needham complained about this to John Corbet. They quarrelled and Corbet demanded of Needham the feudal fee once due to the Corbets from the Lords of the Manor of Shavington—but long since lapsed. When Needham refused, Corbet blocked the path through his park.

Church services continued, with no great show of Christian charity, until hostilities again flared up in 1625, when Sir Robert Needham was created Viscount Kilmorey.

Two years later John Corbet became a baronet. The new viscount sought the interest of the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, and had his private chapel at Shavington re-opened in 1629, though the licence was revoked at Corbet's behest by the Dean of Arches, a higher authority.

Viscount Kilmorey died in 1632, and the next year Sir John carried the fight to the new viscount by instructing the vicar to bury a Corbet footman in the chancel beside Lady Kilmorey.

The vicar demurred. "The chancel is the best part of the church," he said, "and the best man could not have more honour than to be buried there."

But the patron prevailed, though the burial took place after dark. When the news leaked to the new Viscount Kilmorey he got a ruling from an inquiry held at Market Drayton Church that the footman be exhumed.

THE BATTLE FOR A PEW

Civil War

Higher authority reversed the decision, so he invoked the Earl Marshal, who decreed that the contentious corpse be removed.

The initiative being now with Lord Kilmorey, he petitioned Archbishop Laud for permission to construct a private chapel at Adderley Church. Laud, a keen disciplinarian of church patrons, took a knock at Sir John Corbet by granting a licence, and by 1637 an ornate Kilmorey Chapel was built in the north transept.

Victory seemingly lay with Kilmorey, but in 1642 the Civil War had begun and on the Adderley front Kilmorey was for King and Corbet for Parliament.

On March 8, 1642, Lady Corbet arrived early at the church and, with her family and servants, completely occupied the enemy chapel. A fortnight later the Needhams turned up in battle array and pitched the Corbets out of the church.

The church having been thus desecrated, services and hostilities ceased—a truce used by the pro-Corbet churchwardens to remove the Jacobean screen from the Kilmorey Chapel to the west end.

No sooner was the church re-consecrated than on May 8 Lady Corbet and her forces once more occupied the Kilmorey Chapel, this time having posted a guard of 40 men outside.

Again Kilmorey appealed to

Laud, but the archbishop was already a captive of the Parliamentarians, and with Kilmorey fined by Parliament Corbet was the ultimate victor.

This stirring story I found behind the raven sign of the Corbet Arms, Market Drayton, though it must be added that the main branch of the family, now at Acton Reynold, Moreton Corbet, has given great service to Shropshire, the present representative, Sir John Corbet, being High Sheriff.

The sign of the Corbet Arms has two crests—the elephant and castle, which gives its name to another Market Drayton inn, and a squirrel, after which a pub near Hodnet is named.

Today Adderley Church is cut off inside at the chancel arch; the chancel, the Kilmoreys' north transept and the Corbets' south transept are sealed and locked. But still from the north wall of the nave, two Kilmorey tablets in marble face across the church the humbler brass of more recent Corbets.

These include Henry Reginald, owner of the Corbet Arms and the Raven, Market Drayton, until they were bought on his death in 1874 by the Wycherley family.

The Corbets of Moreton Corbet, cousins of the Adderley branch, took the King's side in the Civil War, and their imposing castle was destroyed by fire. Today a gaunt ruin, it raises its graceful ogee-shaped gables to the noisy skies above R.A.F. Shawbury.

A notice at Moreton Corbet Church reads: "Wayfarers welcome from the open road to an open church," and the heraldry on the Corbet memorials is well worth seeing.

Raven

A favourite Christian name of the Corbets is Vincent, so in the east window St. Vincent appears as a young deacon holding the millstone that failed to drown him when hung round his neck. Perched on it is the sable raven of the Corbets, which in its secular setting in Market Drayton sparked off my interest in the family.

—when the knight had to sit in the nave

ADDERLEY
ST. PETER'S
CORBET'S
NEEDHAMS