

**Sandbach History Society**  
**Report of May 2025 meeting**  
**Graham Dodd: Baddiley – an ancient parish**

At the May meeting of Sandbach History Society, Graham Dodd spoke about the ancient parish of Baddiley, near Nantwich. Historian Arthur Mee described it as “an out-of-the-way village lost among the meadows” and Raymond Richards as “one of Cheshire's obscure villages ... hidden away among the fertile meadows.” The population over the last 300 years has only been 200–300 souls, said Mr Dodd, and in 2001 the population was 226.

A digital surface map showed the site of the church and of the hall, Baddiley Mere, outlying farms, the route of a Roman road, a former moated site and the site of a medieval village. In 1805 the Shropshire Union Canal was built.

Mr Dodd said that the area had been occupied since the bronze age with copper deposits at Peckforton and salt from brine springs in the Weaver valley. In 1911 a log boat, made from a hollowed-out trunk of an oak tree, was discovered at the bottom of Baddiley Mere. It is thought that in ancient times the Mere was much bigger than now and the log boat could have been used for transport as well as for fishing. A hoard found at nearby Wrenbury pointed to the existence of a foundry.

In Saxon times the area was part of Mercia. The name Baddiley is thought to have come from Baidda's (a wood or clearing) and leah (forest/pasture). In 1066 the Lord was Aelfric of Gravenhunger. Around 1071 the forest was established by Earl Hugh d'Avranches (Hugh Lupus) for hunting and the Domesday Survey (1086) recorded William Malbank as “Tenant-in-chief” and Lord. Baddiley was listed as Badelia and belonged to the Praer family.

The Mainwarings acquired the Manor of Baddiley from the Praers by marriage around 1350 and retained the estate for about 400 years. William de Mainwaring, Lord of Baddiley and Peover, died in France 1394 and his elaborate tomb can be seen in St. Mary's church, Acton.

In the English Civil War, the Mainwaring family declared themselves as Parliamentarians and supplied men for Sir William Brereton's army. They are also, together with Mr Wilbraham of Dorfold Hall, credited with mediating between the two opposing armies and preventing a skirmish to gain Nantwich.

Sir Thomas Mainwaring died in 1726 and is commemorated in a substantial monument in St Michael's church. He was succeeded by Sir Henry who died without issue in 1797 and the estate then passed to Henry's half-brother, Thomas Wettenhall of White Hall in Nantwich. When he died, at Peover, shortly afterwards, that was the end of the Mainwaring involvement in Baddiley, said Mr Dodd. Baddiley Hall was replaced by the current house towards the end of the 18th century.

Mr Dodd said that the manorial centre of Baddiley was probably a moated site which existed in medieval times but of which nothing now exists.

Nothing is recorded about the day-to-day life in the medieval village but Mr Dodd conjectured how it might have been. He said that typically the income of the lord would come from demesne land, which was cultivated for the lord, and peasant holdings which were financed by the lord through rents and fees.

The inhabitants of the village would have lived in timber-framed houses with wattle and daub walls and a thatched roof. The estate would have been managed by a hierarchy of people with a steward acting as a lord's deputy, protecting his interests. Reporting to him would be a bailiff, the chief law officer and business manager. But the person who did most of the work was the reeve who supervised the village's labour.

The land would have been worked on the 2- or 3-field system divided into long plots, one of which was left fallow to allow rotation. The land would have been worked collectively and harvest would have been an important time with almost all the villagers being involved.

Mr Dodd said it was not clear what happened to the village after this period: was it perhaps disease or was it as a result of the enclosure movement converting the land for sheep grazing.

St Michael's church is one of four timber-framed churches in Cheshire (the others being Peover, Marton and Warburton) and was described by Raymond Richards as "possibly the finest half-timbered church in the County".

Baddiley church was first mentioned in 1308 in Recognisance Rolls (legal documents found in court records). It was granted to Combermere Abbey in the 13th century and in 1355 the Abbott secured the right to nominate a priest. The Mainwarings assumed the advowson (patronage) when the abbey was dissolved in 1538.

Towards the end of the 18th century the church was in a state of disrepair and in 1811 the timber and plaster in the nave was replaced with brick. Just before the restoration, when the Mainwarings left the estate, they took with them the medieval stained-glass of the church and relocated it to Peover.

A prominent feature of the church is the three-decker pulpit which reflected the Protestant view that the word was more important than the sacrament. The sermon was delivered from the top deck, the prayers from the second and the Bible reading from the lower one.

The screen and tympanum, separating the nave from the chancel, is particularly notable and the tympanum is regarded as one of the most colourful in England and features the arms of King Charles II and the Mainwarings. In the chancel the original roof beams are retained.

Mr Dodd said that perhaps one of the most remarkable residents of Baddiley was Helen Macfarlane. She had strong views about equality, including the right of women to vote, and in 1850 translated the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels into English. In 1856 she

married the Revd. John Edwards, a widower and vicar at Baddiley. They had two children but she died in 1860, aged 41, and is buried at Baddiley. Mr Dodd said that on the anniversary of her death, members of the Communist movement visit her grave and leave behind a red bandana.

In 1849 Nantwich experienced a cholera outbreak causing several deaths. This precipitated a requirement for a better supply of water, said Mr Dodd, and Baddiley Mere, with its extensive springs was identified as a suitable source. In 1855 it became Nantwich's supplier but such was the demand but they had to expand the capacity by constructing a new reservoir at the eastern end of the mere, opened in 1869. The water works are sighted opposite the church. By 1920 it was necessary to upgrade the reservoir further.

Mr Dodd ended by saying that regardless of its long history, Baddiley has survived as a scattered, obscure, and unspoilt parish.

A group of history society members visited St Michael's Church at the beginning of June. Churchwarden, Rob Vine gave a short history of the church and pointed out some of the unique features of this Grade I church including the tympanum, box pews, three-decker pulpit and the retained sections of the original timber-framed building. He also pointed out the site of the deserted medieval village to the south of the church which is a scheduled monument and cannot be ploughed or searched using metal detectors.

The next meeting of Sandbach History Society will be held after the summer break on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September. Details of the Society can be found at [sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk](http://sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk)