

Poet and
Parish Priest



Reginald Heber's life in
Malpas and Hodnet

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POET AND PARISH PRIEST

An account of Reginald Heber's Life in Malpas and Hodnet

"I take the very first opportunity of acquainting my dear friends that my dear Mary was, a little after three this morning, safely delivered of a fine little lad. I thank God she and the little Bab are both as well as can be expected. He is as fat as a little mole and they say looks very well".

So wrote the Reverend Reginald Heber of Malpas Higher Rectory to his sister Elizabeth in London, on the occasion of the birth of his second son on April 21st 1783. The day is still commemorated by a brass plate on the door of the room in which the birth took place for that son, also named Reginald, was to finish his life as the Bishop of Calcutta. However, he did not go to India until he was forty and the three years he lived there have been well documented, both in his own journal and in the biography written by his widow. I intend to concentrate on his life before he went to India and to look at his boyhood and youth, his travels, his talents as poet and artist and his life as a Shropshire Parish priest.

Reginald Heber junior was born into a world where great changes had and were to take place in both home and foreign affairs. During the year of his birth was signed the Treaty of Versailles, which finally recognised the United States of America as an independent nation. England then ceased to be at war with France as an ally of the American colonies but was soon to be at war with her again, in Europe and North Africa, during the Napoleonic Wars. He lived through the years of the French Revolution, the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo, the Peterloo Riots in Manchester and the abolition of the Slave Trade. Among his many famous contemporaries were Napoleon, Nelson, William Wilberforce, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Sir Walter Scott and Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate who composed the verses on the Heber Memorial in Hodnet Church. The India where he was to finish his life had been opened up to trade by the East India Company with the help of such men as Robert Clive, who was born and buried in Shropshire's Moreton Say, where Heber himself later lived.

Reginald Heber senior came from a Yorkshire family which had estates near Skipton and acquired the Shropshire estate of Hodnet in 1752. He went to Brasenose College at Oxford, a college which has historic links with Cheshire, and later became Tutor there. From 1766 to 1770 he was Rector of Chelsea, after which he moved to Malpas to become incumbent of the Higher Rectory.

Malpas is unusual, although by no means unique, in that it had two rectors serving the one parish church until the late nineteenth century. The situation first arose in Norman times when Baron Robert Fitzhugh of Malpas died without a male heir. The inheritance was divided between two daughters, both of whom inherited the right to nominate a rector. There are other explanations for the situation, remembered in our local folklore. Although they are not true they are certainly more colourful than the correct one!

Three years after coming to Malpas, Reginald married Mary Baylie. Alas, she only lived for a short time after the marriage and died soon after the birth of their son, Richard. Although he became a Member of Parliament this Richard is better remembered as a notorious book collector. When he died in 1833 he left over 200,000 books, housed in collections throughout Europe. He had two houses in London and another in Oxford, all "stacked from garret to cellar". The passion for collecting began while he was still at boarding school in London. When he was only fifteen his father wrote to him that "collecting books draws men into ruinous extravagancies. It is an itch which grows by indulgence and should be nipped in the bud". Three years later, when Richard was at university, his half brother Reginald, subject of this biography, wrote to him from Malpas: *"You are charged by Uncle who is now here and Aunt Tet with purloining a folio volume of his 'Corpus Poetarum', and if you do not bring it down with you next summer you will be sent to Botany Bay!"*.

We are fortunate that both the Reginalds were prolific letter writers and that much of their correspondence has been preserved, either in published form or in library collections, particularly in the Bodleian Library at Oxford. From the many letters we are able to gain an insight into the life of the Heber family, in Malpas and further afield.

Reginald Heber senior remarried in 1782 to Mary Allanson, by whom he had three children. They were Reginald, Thomas and Mary, born in 1783, 1785 and 1787.

Mary was an attentive mother whilst Reginald senior showed the pretended impatience which many fathers display over new babies. When Reginald junior was just a week old, father again wrote to his sister: *"Mary is monstrous fond of the little brat and thinks him very pretty indeed. For my part though I don't think him an ugly boy, yet I cannot as yet descry the number of beauties his mother sees in him"*.

The Heber children appeared to have had a happy childhood in Malpas. Their parents enjoyed good relationships with other families in the district and we read of them dining at Iscoyd Park and Bolesworth Castle, going to a ball at Cholmondeley Castle, supporting the local horse races and attending a performance as 'As You Like It' at Wynnstay. After the last mentioned event the Rector wrote:

"We did not leave Wynnstay till after twelve o'clock and came home to Malpas that night or rather morning where we arrived safe and sound at about half past three, eat each an egg upon a toast, drank a glass of negus and got to bed about four, went to our bye and kept at our bye till eleven the next day".

In the year that son Reginald was born, Richard went away to boarding school at Greenford in Middlesex. He was not an over healthy child and his father obviously worried about him a great deal. He wrote to Richard's Aunt Elizabeth in London to *"tell dear Dicky I lay my absolute commands upon him not to skate at all during the holidays, as bad accidents happen, limbs are broken, skulls fractured and lives lost every winter in the frozen ponds in St. James' Park, Hyde Park and other places"*.

Reginald junior was also a rather weak child, although it is hard to believe that he was really quite the child later portrayed in his biography, in which his widow wrote:

"When little more than two years old, he was dangerously ill with the whooping-cough, for which he was ordered to be blooded: his mother took him on her knees, saying 'Dr Currie wishes you to lose a little blood; I hope you will not object'. His answer was 'I will do whatever you please, mamma". On the nurse screaming out that they were going

to murder her child, 'Poor nurse', Reginald said 'Let her go downstairs'. The apothecary then took hold of his arm, on which he exclaimed, 'Do not hold me!' When assured that if he moved, he would be much more hurt, 'I won't stir', he replied and steadily held out his arm, looking the whole time at the operation.

The following year, when travelling with his parents on a very stormy day, across the mountainous country between Ripon and Craven, his mother was much alarmed and proposed to leave the carriage and walk. Reginald, sitting on her knee, said 'Do not be afraid mamma, God will take care of us'.

In 1787, he had an attack of inflammation of the lungs, and was very dangerously ill; the severe remedies to which he was forced to submit were borne without a murmur, and his patience was so remarkable that, on his father asking the physician whether there was any hope of saving his life, Dr Currie answered 'If he were not the most tractable child I ever saw there would be none; but I think he will recover'. In childhood he suffered much from inflammatory disorders. The hours of convalescence were invariably employed in endeavouring to acquire information and at six years old, after an attack of typhus fever which again nearly brought him to the grave, the first indulgence for which he pleaded was to learn the Latin grammar, that he might have some employment while lying in bed".

He was obviously very attached to Dr Thomas Townson, who occupied the Lower Rectory (now the Bolling), and used to visit him frequently to look at his collection of books and engravings. It was probably Dr Townson who fostered the talent for drawing which gave Reginald so much pleasure in later life. At the age of ten he entered Whitchurch Grammar School as a pupil of Dr Kent. It seems to have been there that his love of poetry developed and he produced his first attempts at verse.

Malpas was still a thriving market town where Lord Cholmondeley and Mr Drake had recently erected many new buildings, such as the Old Printing House and Market House in Church Street and High Street (or Windmill Street, as it was then known). We can imagine Tiddy, as young Reginald was called by his family, with his brother Tommy enjoying the delights of Malpas Fair where "the ladies had the felicity of perambulating the streets

and buying bargains, viz. toys, gingerbreads and Welch blankets". Father was not so keen on shopping. He once wrote, "I know not whether I shall accompany the ladies to Chester as they will be busy in the shops where I have no business at all".

No doubt the children used to visit the shops in Malpas and watch the local craftsmen at work, such as Mr Crump the cooper, Mr Parry the wheelwright, Mr Ashley the saddler and Mr Brown the breeches maker.

For the sake of their health the family used to take occasional holidays at the fashionable watering places such as Parkgate on the Wirral. In 1790 Reginald senior wrote from Parkgate, "We arrived on this coast last night and the children bore the journey without being coach-sick. If the weather holds fair I think the sea air and bathing will be of service in strengthening and bracing both Mama and her babes".

The following Christmas Mama had one of her frequent illnesses but this did not prevent "I and Tiddy" from paying "our annual Christmas visit to Mrs Bridge (the curate's wife) to partake of her goose, pye and other good Christmas cheer while poor Mama was indulging upon water gruel in her bed".

As well as being Rector of Malpas, Reginald senior became Rector of Hodnet, in 1787. He writes of a visit there at Whitsun in 1791 when, together with sons Reginald and Tommy, he watched the Hodnet Amicable Club (Friendly Society) in a procession of "two hundred men with White Staves and a Band of Music to Hodnet Church".

Things were warming up on the international scene. In 1789 the French Revolutionaries had stormed the Bastille and by early 1793 the French monarchy had disappeared, with the execution of Louis XVI. There were those in this country who appeared to support the Revolutionaries. Among them was Thomas Paine, author of "The Rights of Man". We can sense the public feeling against such people when Rector Heber writes in 1793. "Loyalty triumphs in every corner of the kingdom. Tom Paine was first shot through and then burnt in effigy at Malpas Cross on Wednesday and a Band of Music pervades every street, playing and singing 'God Save Great George Our King'. Tiddy, Tom and Missy (young Mary Heber) amused themselves in dressing up two figures to represent Tom Paine and Demourrier (a French general) which they carried about stuck upon their hunting poles all day long".

In 1796 young Reginald was sent to Mr Bristow's boarding school at Neasden, in north London. Because of his generous nature, it is said, the bank notes given to him for his half year's pocket money at school had to be sewn within the lining of his pockets, to discourage him from giving them away in charity on route to London.

His natural interests and talents were in the realm of the arts rather than the sciences. In 1798, when he was fifteen, Nelson's defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of the Nile inspired him to write a poem called "The Prophecy of Ishmael". The poem contains the following lines echoing the widespread anti-French feeling:

*"And now shall Gaul with conqu'ring armies come?
Gaul! but a province of defeated Rome!
Shall she expel, though far renown'd in fight,
The Sons of Ishmael from their ancient right?
No, no; from me, ye robbers, learn your fate,
Lament and die, return is now too late".*

All over the country people were becoming alarmed by the prospect of invasion. Naughty children were threatened that "Boney" would get them! Collections were made to help prepare against the threat of attack from France. A printed list of some 700 people in the parish of Malpas who contributed to the war effort is now preserved in Chester Castle, as "Malpas Voluntary Contribution for the Defence of the Country, 1798". Included in the list are contributions of £131 from the Heber family and £111 from their in-laws, the Allansons.

Although apparently a rather "bookish" boy Reginald still managed to get into the occasional scrape at school. At one time he had been reading an account of the manner in which an African traveller had successfully parried the attack of a wild bull. There happened to be grazing, in a field next to the school, a bull of rather lively temperament. Reginald resolved upon making a similar experiment with this animal and advanced towards it, holding his hat before his face and repeating the action of the intrepid African traveller. He expected the bull to take flight. On the contrary it ran furiously at him. Reginald escaped by jumping over some rails but the animal, not being so nimble, plunged headlong into a pool of water and *"remained sticking fast in the mud with his head not many feet from an alcove on the opposite side in which sat, quietly at their tea, Mr Bristow and his wife, little*

expecting such a visitor!".

Another time he had a misunderstanding with Mr Bristow, the headmaster, who had gone out and did not return in time for school dinner. The rule was that the boys did not dine without him but Reginald and his fellow pupils were ravenous. Eventually Reginald took it upon himself to go into the kitchen where he *"took off in triumph a dish of pork chops and another of potatoes"*. Mr Bristow was not at all pleased when he returned. Reginald wrote to his father, *"He has not spoken to any of us since, nor will he eat at the same table. Since it is impossible for me to go on in this way, pray give me some directions for my conduct in this disagreeable business"*.

It was at Neasden that he established a friendship with John Thornton, from Surrey, a friendship which was to last for the rest of his life and which resulted in many letters telling us about his youth and early manhood. In 1800 they parted company for a time, John going off to Cambridge University and, later in the year, Reginald going up to Oxford. During a short stay in Malpas before going to university he wrote to John, *"I am much amused with the preparations I see for furnishing me with household stuff, such as table-cloths, sheets, etc. etc: it is surely a luxurious age when a boy of seventeen requires so much fuss to fit him out. I have been a much gayer fellow than of late, having been at a race, and also at, what I never saw before, a masquerade"*. The horse race was at Shrewsbury, the masquerade (masked ball) at Wynnstay. He may also have attended the local races at Threapwood in September of that year, these races being supported by many of the local gentry and farmers.

Once at university he appears to have worked very hard and to have avoided the temptations of student social life. "He never allowed his hours of study to be abridged by evening parties, but would often tie a wet cloth round his head to keep off the approach of sleep". In his first year he was awarded the university prize for Latin verse, for his poem "Carmen Seulare", which celebrated the opening of the new century. He achieved a further taste of fame with another prize winning poem, "Palestine", which he wrote in 1803. During the course of its composition he happened to breakfast with Sir Walter Scott, who was visiting the university. Tradition has it that the great poet suggested one or two improvements to Heber's poem. Some years later, Dr Crotch, Professor of Music at the university, set the poem to music in the form of an oratorio. The piece was first performed in 1812. Although at one time very popular it is seldom performed nowadays.

The threat of invasion from the Continent grew even stronger and military Volunteer Corps were being formed all over the country. Reginald's half brother Richard had raised a company in Hodnet while Malpas had a body under the command of Mr Dod of Edge Hall. When Reginald returned to Malpas for the long vacation in 1803, Mr Dod asked him to write a battle hymn for the Malpas corps. He duly obliged with "Honour its own Reward", an anthem calculated to stir the heart of every Cheshire yeoman.

*"Swell, swell the shrill trumpet clear sounding afar,
Our sabres flash splendour around,
For freedom has summon'd her sons to the war,
Nor Britain has shrunk from the sound".*

Richard inherited the family estates in Marton (Yorkshire) and Hodnet, following the death of Rector Heber at Malpas, in January 1804. Having already been commissioned a captain in the Shropshire Volunteers, in 1802, he was then appointed, in his capacity as a Yorkshire Landowner, to be Colonel of the Craven Legion. Meanwhile Reginald was coming to the end of his initial studies at Brasenose College, Oxford. He graduated in 1804 and was elected a Fellow of All Souls College in November of that year. It was to Reginald that Richard delegated his duties in the Shropshire Volunteers. After his father's death Reginald's mother, brother Thomas and sister Mary had moved to Hodnet Hall and it was here that Reginald based himself.

From the regular letters that he sent to Richard at this time one gets the impression that Reginald was not really cut out to exert military discipline. He took over the Hodnet Volunteers in the September and found them much given to drinking and going to Market Drayton, where he feared that they would lose *"their morals and civility as well as their discipline"*. Still, he seems to have knocked them into shape by the next month when, on a march to Shrewsbury, *"a very fine strapping fellow came running after us in his shirt sleeves and prayed admission into the Company. He had heard the drum in the morning as he was riddling in a barn and at once by a sudden start of patriotism, and without stopping to put on his clothes, followed us till he overtook us"*. One wonders at the state of their marching since *"We have been much pestered by quarrels between the Wem, Ellesmere and Drayton bands, who are all impudent and all play detestably. The men today were very attentive but really could not keep time to the music"*. The military bands would have contained the

same sort of instruments as the orchestra which accompanied the singing in Malpas Church at that time and boasted flutes, oboes, clarinets and serpent. Anyone who has witnessed attempts to play a serpent in tune will understand why the playing was detestable!

Reginald had quit the military world by the middle of 1805, when he set out with his old schoolfriend John Thornton for the "Grand Tour" of Europe, which in those days before school trips and package tours was considered an essential part of every young gentleman's education. They travelled extensively in Scandinavia, Russia, the Crimea, Hungary, Austria, Prussia and Germany. Heber kept a detailed journal of his travels and, having been so fascinated by Russia, later started to write a "History of the Cossacks". Although never completed, this was published posthumously as an appendix to the biography by his widow. The tour took place during a period when many people hesitated to travel on the Continent, due to the continuing wars with France. The two friends were in Russia while Nelson fought the Battle of Trafalgar and they finally arrived back in Great Yarmouth on October 14th 1806, the day on which Napoleon won the Battle of Jena, giving him control over Prussia.

On Heber's return to Hodnet the farmers and people of the village subscribed to lay on a great feast, the occasion of "*Master Reginald's coming back safe*". He then became involved in campaigning on behalf of Richard, who stood unsuccessfully for election as Member of parliament for the University of Oxford. By November he had resumed his studies at All Souls and was seriously considering whether to take holy orders with a view to entering the church. He decided to do so and was instituted to the family living as Rector of Hodnet in 1807, after which he returned to Oxford to take his Master of Arts degree.

It was at this time that he began to write a great deal of verse, in many different styles and on a variety of subjects. Having completed his studies, he returned to Hodnet to take up his duties as parish priest. He had mixed feelings about his situation and wrote to John Thornton:

"My feelings are, I believe, the normal ones of young men who find themselves entering upon the duties of a profession, in which their life is to be spent I will fairly own that the cordiality of these honest people has been the occasion of some very serious and melancholy reflections. It is really an appalling thing to have so high expectations formed of a young man's future conduct".

And in the days before church unity we find him writing: *"The Methodists in Hodnet are, thank God, not very numerous, and I hope to diminish them still more"*. He was showing greater tolerance eighteen years later when, as Bishop of Calcutta, he encouraged the Anglican missionaries in his care to meet with the missionaries of other denominations.

In 1804, when in charge of the Hodnet Volunteers, he had dined at the house of Colonel Chaytor, at Adderley near Market Drayton. Among the other guests were the Miss Shipleys, daughters of the Dean of St Asaph. Perhaps this was his very first meeting with Amelia (Emily) Shipley. By the September of 1808 he was obviously very fond of her and thinking of marriage, since he wrote to Richard: *"I have enjoyed opportunities of often repeated conversations with Emily Shipley - have been fully convinced of her good sense, her cultivated mind and her attachment to me I rely on your promise to love her as a sister for my sake"*.

They were married the following year. After a honeymoon at Llanbedr, they stayed at Hodnet Hall while improvements were being made to the rectory. Thus Reginald settled down to the busy life of a rural clergyman, still indulging his passions for writing and drawing when time allowed. He made plans for opening a school in Hodnet, involved himself in the work of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, visited the sick, the poor and the elderly and started to write some of the many hymns for which he is remembered.

In 1812 the couple moved to the parsonage house at Moreton Say, which is in Hodnet Parish, and remained there for two years while the old rectory at Hodnet was re-built. Reginald had always been interested in architecture and there still survives a sketch plan and letter which he sent to Mr Haycock, an architect in Shrewsbury, describing what he would like done at the rectory.

It was at this time that he began to suffer badly from the distressing skin disorder known as erysipelas. This had probably been contracted as a result of exposure to the cold while travelling in the Crimea with John Thornton. Reginald seems to have suffered considerably and he tried many cures, including taking the spa waters at Harrogate, sea bathing at Hoylake and taking mercury.

He still fostered doubts concerning his suitability for the life of a clergyman and in 1813 wrote to his old friend *"I sometimes think that I am not thrown into that situation of life for which I am best qualified. I am in a sort of half-way station, between a parson and a squire ... I have sometimes felt an unwillingness in quitting my books for the care of my parish I write sermons, and have moderately good congregations the schools, etc., which I projected are all comparatively at a standstill; and I am occasionally disposed to fancy that a man cannot attend to two pursuits at once, and that it will be at length necessary to burn my books, like the early converts to Christianity"*. As well as continuing to write poetry he contributed literary articles to "The Quarterly Review" and worked on the compilation of a Dictionary of the Bible, which he never completed.

During his time at Hodnet Heber received a number of appointments which indicated how well he was regarded in both church and academic circles. He was created a prebendary of St Asaph in 1812, invited to be Bampton lecturer at Oxford for 1815 and appointed Preacher at Lincoln's Inn, London, in 1822.

He appears to have suffered from quite serious financial difficulties at times, a situation not helped when the Nantwich Old Bank, in which he had a considerable amount of money, failed in 1816.

Reginald's younger brother, Thomas, acted as his curate until 1815, after which he became perpetual curate of Moreton Say. Soon afterwards he died of a cerebral haemorrhage. This was a great blow to Reginald. It has been suggested that it was this event which led him to write soon afterwards, in one of his hymns:

*"O Thou that every thought canst know
And answer every prayer;
Oh give me sickness, want, or woe,
But snatch me from despair!"*

This was the year of the Battle of Waterloo and two years later, in 1817, Reginald visited Wynnstay "where I went to meet the Grand Duke (of Wellington) ... who, however ... journeying as royal and imperial highnesses usually do, had left the house before I got there, having paid a visit of about ten hours instead of three days, as had been expected!". The same year there was a serious outbreak of typhus fever in Shropshire, which killed many of the poor but seems to have by-passed the family at Hodnet Rectory.

By the April of 1818 the Heber's first child was due and Reginald took Amelia to stay in Chester during her confinement. They had a daughter, Barbara, but she was a weak child. The hot weather of the following summer brought on a violent illness and she died on Christmas Eve.

1819 was the year of "From Greenland's Icy Mountains". Heber wrote the hymn for a missionary service in Wrexham Church, at which his father-in-law, Dean Shipley, was due to preach. The hymn's composition is commemorated by a window in the parish church at Wrexham and by a plaque on Vicarage Hill, marking the site of the old vicarage where the actual writing is supposed to have taken place. For some reason the hymn really captured the public's imagination. A local printer, who had the foresight to produce a facsimile of Heber's original manuscript sold many thousand of copies. The original manuscript is now in the John Rylands Library in Manchester but copies of the facsimile are occasionally found in private hands. Perhaps the words that Reginald wrote were in the nature of private thoughts, publicly spoken:

*"From many an ancient River,
From many a palmy plain,
They call us to deliver
Their land from error's chain".*

It was three years later that the Right Honourable Charles Watkin Williams Wynn of Wynnstay, a friend of the family, was appointed as President of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India. The appointment was to have far reaching consequences for the Hebers. In the same year Bishop Middleton of Calcutta died and Williams Wynn lost no time in hinting to Reginald that he thought him the ideal man to fill the vacancy. The suggestion set Reginald into a turmoil. Could he ignore the call to the Ganges, that "*ancient river*"? On the other hand, would it be fair to his family if he answered it? His mother, now seventy-one, became distressed at the prospect that she would probably never see her son again. His second daughter, Emily, born the previous year, was not a strong child and the doctors he consulted seemed unable to agree over her ability to stand up to the journey and the Indian climate. India was regarded as a country where many emigrants, even if they survived the lengthy voyage, soon fell foul of the heat and diseases of the sub-continent.

Eventually he wrote to Williams Wynn, agreeing to allow his name to be put forward as a candidate for the vacancy. By December he had changed his mind and wrote to withdraw. Then in January, having had a favourable medical report on his daughter, he wrote again, saying "*should you really find the difficulty great in procuring a fit man for the situation the sacrifice which I would not make for wealth and dignity, both my wife and I will cheerfully make in order to prevent any serious inconvenience to a cause of so much importance*".

On receipt of this letter Williams Wynn discussed the matter with the East India Company directors and replied to Reginald, on January 15th, 1823:

"I will write down to Brighton tomorrow in order to submit your name for the King's approbation".

In these days of a probing press and instant news flashes, we might find it surprising that "The Times" for January 21st announced "*Dr Shepherd and Mr Reginald Heber have both refused the acceptance of the Bishoprick of Calcutta*".

In fact, King George, who was convalescing in his newly built Pavilion at Brighton, had already given his approval to the appointment. By January 27th "The Times" was able to announce *"We have it from authority on which we can rely, that the Rev. Reginald Heber is appointed to (and has accepted) the vacant see of Calcutta. Mr Heber goes to India forthwith"*.

And so Reginald had come to a great cross-roads in his life, finally choosing the route that led to India. He had no illusions about the hardships he and his family would have to face. The following five months were a period of intense preparation, both physically and spiritually, for the task that lay ahead. Affairs had to be wound up, clothes bought and luggage packed. Although he would receive a stipend of £5,000, which we might consider very generous for those times, much of this would be spent on setting up and maintaining his household abroad in the manner expected of a Bishop. Everyone travelling to India had to do so under the wing of the East India Company and with their approval. The Company granted £1,200 to the family *"towards expenses of passage and outfit to India"*. It is recorded in the Company's minutes for May 14th 1823:

"On reading a letter from the Reverend Reginald Heber D.D. Ordered: That he be permitted to take with him to Bengal his wife, a female child, and an English and a Hindostanee female servant, the company being at no expense thereby, also That he be permitted to take with him on board the Thomas Grenville, twenty six cases (containing Baggage &c.) exclusive of Cabin Furniture and Travelling Trunks, and that the Committee of Shipping be requested to give the necessary directions accordingly".

It will be noted that Reginald was now "D.D.", Doctor of Divinity. He had always intended to study for his doctorate and, in the circumstances, wrote to the Bishop of Oxford to ask what the procedure would be if he wished to qualify before leaving for India. He was naturally delighted when the reply came stating that he was to be awarded an honorary doctorate. In addition, the Fellows of All Souls College arranged for him to have his portrait painted, so that it might hang in a place of honour in their hall.

The parishioners of Hodnet were sad to hear that they were going to lose their kindly Rector. Arrangements had to be made for his departure from Shropshire and in January we find him writing to Joseph Hughes, the Parish Clerk: *"My chief business at present is, that I wish, this severe weather, to distribute three waggon loads of coals to the poor inhabitants of Hodnet parish"*. The parishioners raised a subscription to present their beloved pastor with a piece of plate, inscribed *"with the hope that it may remind him, in a far distant land, of those who will never cease to think of his virtues with affection, and his loss with regret"*.

He visited Malpas to preach a farewell sermon in St. Oswald's Church, this being the only time in his life that he preached there. He also said farewell to Mrs Dod of Edge, who had been a lifelong friend. She parted with the words *"Well Reginald (for I never can call you 'my lord'), God be with you wherever you go. You have done much good at home and if you ever effect half what you propose for India, your name will be venerated there to the end of time"*.

The family left Hodnet on April 22nd and travelled via Oxford to London, where Reginald was to deliver his last sermon as Preacher at Lincoln's Inn. On the first day of June he was consecrated as Bishop of Calcutta by the Archbishop of Canterbury, at Lambeth Palace.

Following this, he wrote in his "Journal of a Voyage to India" :

"On Monday, June 16th, 1823, we went down by the Ramsgate steam-boat, to join the Thomas Grenville at the Lower Hope (Gravesend), accompanied by a party of kind relatives and friends who were willing to let us see as much of them as we could before our necessary separation. Captain Manning had the yards of ship manned, and fired a salute in compliment to us. The Grenville weighed anchor soon after we were on board, but met with an adverse wind, and advanced a very little way down river".

There were forty-one passengers, including soldiers returning to their regiments, journalists and servants. Among them were Susannah and Rebecca, the servants accompanying Mrs Heber.

Although the voyage was long Reginald kept himself very busy. He conducted regular services on the ship, caught up on his reading, including Scott's novel "Quentin Durward", studied Hindoostanee and watched the marine wildlife. Among the sights he recorded were flying fish, porpoises and whales. He was rather horrified to discover the sailors fishing on a Sunday and persuaded them to pull in their lines! The traditional "Crossing the Line" ceremonies took place in July when *"A sailor from the fore-chains, in a dismal voice aggravated by a speaking trumpet, hailed Captain Manning as if from the sea, and after a short conversation carried on with becoming gravity, Neptune was supposed to take his leave, and a barrel, with a lighted candle in it, was sent off from the fore-chains to represent his boat dropping astern"*.

As the "Thomas Grenville" approached the Cape of Good Hope in August, she encountered spells of very rough weather. At one time it became so rough that Reginald took his hammock from its hooks and slept upon the floor.

By mid-September preparations were being made for the approach to India, including painting the ship prior to her appearing in harbour. At last, on October 6th, the ship's log records:

"Weighed with light variable airs and at 1 p.m. anchored abreast the lower moorings at Diamond Harbour. At 5 p.m. the Bishop left us. Manned yards and saluted him with 17 guns. Captain Manning and all passengers left the ship".

There followed four more days of travel by river and road until, on October 10th, *"We saw Calcutta, its white houses glittering through the twilight"*.

So began for Reginald Heber two and a half years of intense activity as Bishop and missionary. He travelled many miles, particularly in the northern parts of India which had not been visited by his predecessor, Bishop Middleton. He was the true founder and consolidator of the diocese of Calcutta, strengthening the whole fabric of Christian life in India and urging new developments, many of which were not to come to fruition until after his death. To describe all of his activities would require another book. At present, those who wish to read of them must consult the Bishop's own "Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India, 1824 -25" and the biographies by his widow and others, wordy though they are, until the full-length modern biography, now in preparation, appears.

On April 3rd 1826, after a confirmation service at Trichinopoly, the Bishop went to take his bath. The bathroom was, in effect, a small covered pool. The weather had been intensely hot, the Bishop was very tired and, as he descended the steps, he suffered a stroke, fell into the water and was drowned.

His chaplain, Thomas Robinson, later wrote : *"How shall I record my feelings this sad, this miserable day! I am writing by the lifeless body of my dear departed Master! Here lies one who has been the tenderest, the most affectionate friend one whom I have always loved most dearly, but till now knew not how much I loved him"*.

Robert Southey remembered him with the words:

*"Heber, thou art not dead thou canst not die!
Nor can I think of thee as lost"*.

And so his memory and example live on, the memory and example of a man with human strengths and weaknesses, driven by a burning desire to serve God.

This was the fine little lad born in Malpas Rectory, two hundred years ago.

David Hayns
February 1983

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The Last Days of Bishop Heber (1830)

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In the time available to me to write this article, I have not had the opportunity to consult the large collection of Heber Family papers on which R.H. Cholmondeley's "The Heber Letters" is based. This collection is now in the Bodleian Library, Ref: Western Manuscripts - MS. English Letters. I am extremely grateful to Mr Derrick Hughes, who is working on a full-scale modern biography of Heber, for so kindly providing me with notes upon the Bodleian collection and allowing me to quote from them in this article. I am grateful to him further for reading my manuscript and correcting me on a number of points. Any errors that remain are mine.

I would like to record my thanks for the considerable amount of help received from the archivists and librarians who have guided me to the manuscript sources in the following repositories:

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1798. Ref: DDX/551

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Letter from Heber to John Haycock about alterations to Hodnet
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LAMBETH PALACE LIBRARY

Record of Heber's consecration as Bishop of Calcutta, 1.6.1823.
Ref: Act Book, 1813-1826, Vol. 14, p.p. 459-60

INDIA OFFICE LIBRARY

Journal of H.C.S. "Thomas Grenville", commencing 10.1.1818.
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Letter from Heber to Directors of East India Company.
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