

NOTES ON
NEWBURY BAPTISTS
1640 - 1940

In Commemoration
of the Tercentenary of the Church
Founded 1640

By
W. J. Lewendon

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" . . . God's providence is not blind, but full of eyes,
It searches all the refuges of lies;
And in His time and way, the accursed things
Before whose evil feet thy battle-gage
Has clashed defiance from hot youth to age Shall perish.
All men shall be priests and kings
One royal brotherhood, one Church made free
By love, which is the law of liberty.

"GARIBALDI" J. G. WHITTIER.

FOREWORD

THE successful completion this year of a removal, and re-building scheme, coupled with the noteworthy occasion of the tercentenary of the Newbury Church, may be deemed a sufficient excuse for this modest effort to record some of its inner history.

There is no special reason why the writer should have been requested to make these records for publication, apart from the known fact that he had collected a certain amount of data in addition to that which can be culled from the Church books.

It must be admitted, however, that all efforts to acquire information relating to local Baptists living in the early part of the 17th century have been unavailing.

To have access to the original written records of the intimate affairs of a Church, whose history has covered three centuries, is no commonplace experience, but a privilege. Apart from those whose names appear prominently upon the pages of the past, are the nameless faithful followers who have been the life-blood of the Church in their day and generation.

As with the history of a nation, or an individual, so is it with the Church. Periods of reaching the peaks are followed by passages through dark valleys, to be succeeded by another ascent into the sunlight.

Having shared for so many decades in the Municipal, and Religious life of this ancient Borough, Baptists, as loyal citizens, are not ashamed of the part they have taken in local affairs. Hardly were they formed into an organized Body before civil war (against the dictatorship of Charles I) was raged in their midst.

To-day after 300 years, our beloved Country is an armed camp, withstanding the assaults of a ruthless dictatorship; and the words "freedom" and "liberty" are constantly upon our lips. As these lines are being written we learn that a

Baptist place of worship has been blown up by bombs; but near the ruins, (in the evening) the Church held an open-air service. The Church is not destroyed.

Thos. Watson, one of the ejected puritan Divines said "If enemies destroy the Church it must be at a time when there is neither day, nor night, for Christ keeps it day, and night."

Two other Churches in Berkshire, have, this year reached their tercentenary, one in the busy County Town, and the other in the quiet seclusion of King Alfred's Country.

We salute our fellow Baptists at King's Road, Reading, and also offer our felicitations to our friends at Wantage.

W. J. LEWENDON, Speen, Newbury. September, 1940.

Should any profits accrue from sale of these Notes it will benefit the Building Fund.

INTRODUCTORY

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely,
according to conscience, - above all liberty." JOHN MILTON.

Many and excellent books are available dealing with English Nonconformity and the early Puritans. These valuable records never fail to stir our blood, as we read of the stern struggles, indomitable faith, and unflinching courage of the early founders of our Free Church Communities.

In the early part of the 17th century, when Baptist Churches were being established in Britain, controversy divided them into two camps, "Particular" or Calvinistic, and "General" or Arminian. The Local Church came under the former head, until amalgamation of the two Bodies at the close of the 19th century.

It is recorded that the last Englishman put to death for heresy, Edward Wightman, was burnt at Lichfield in 1612. At this time separate Churches were being formed by the Puritan element. Leonard Busher, a London Baptist, published in 1614 "A Plea for Liberty of Conscience." This was reported to be the earliest writing upon the subject known.

Charles I, the dictator, as we are aware, allowed the ecclesiastical courts full power, and from their cruel findings there was no appeal. That Newbury Baptists had their full share of suffering at this period is quite evident; but we have very little authentic information regarding this inquisition. Many people fled to Holland and New England to seek freedom and peace.

In Money's first History of Newbury is an account of those sturdy Puritans who left their native town, owing to persecution, to found a settlement in Massachusetts, North America. We learn that Rev. Thomas Parker, M.A. (son of a prominent Puritan preacher) was a Master at the Newbury Grammar School, and also assisted the famous Dr. Twisse, the Rector of Newbury.

In 1634, he, with many other local citizens of kindred mind, crossed the Atlantic and established the settlement which they named after their native town. Doubtless many others, in the years following, fled to find refuge with their fellow townsmen at Newbury, in America.

It is recorded that, for being a Baptist preacher, Thos. Brewer, of Ashford, suffered fourteen years in jail, and was released in 1640.

The following year Ed. Barber, of Bishopsgate (former clergyman of the established Church) received twelve months imprisonment for publishing a book on Baptism by immersion. This same year the Episcopacy was overthrown in England; and the Newbury Baptist Church had been founded.

They had stiff knees, the Puritans,
That were not good at bending;
The home-spun dignity of man
They thought was worth defending.

NEWBURY BAPTISTS

In consequence of the fact that there is not in our possession any earlier written record than 1770 very little authentic information prior to this date is available.

The first effort to record the early history of the Newbury Church was made by Rev. James Bicheno, M.A., in 1781, and to him we are entirely indebted for information relating to this period.

This gifted man wrote what he terms an "Introduction to the Acts and Proceedings of the, Church of Christ meeting for divine worship at Newbury." This consists of some forty pages, forming a kind of preface to the book which he commenced and kept.

The first part forms a statement of religious principles and practices, with numerous scriptural references in the margin. Then follows a masterly and concise survey of the history of Baptists in general, from the earliest times. Referring to the Newbury Church, Mr. Bicheno says "Those few records that have been made, at least the greater part of them, throw very little light upon the real history of the Church, and only serve to inform us of the necessity of "mending our ways, and our doings, that God may cause us to dwell in this place."

The references to the Newbury Church in Hall and Marsh's History 1839, throws no new light on the researches of Mr. Bicheno, but an account is added of his personal history and abilities, and reference made to his twenty-seven years' ministry at Newbury.

Inserted in the Church book to which we referred is an original letter addressed to the Association meetings at Abingdon, and dated 1708, while another letter from Newbury is to the Wantage Assembly.

These letters are interesting specimens of calligraphy, and must be the oldest records of the Church, but they reveal little of an encouraging nature relating to the Church at the time.

In 1924 the two early parchment covered books were loaned, and placed on view at the Exhibition at Stockholm, where they created a great deal of interest.

One book contains an entry dated 6th day, of September, 1770, relating to the appointment of new trustees of the Northcroft Meeting House. Five men were elected from Newbury, viz, Messrs. Nias, Whitewood, Wilkins, Coombs, and Horler, while the following were nominated from Abingdon, Messrs. Joseph, William, and Benjamin Tomkins, and Joseph Butler. At the other end of the book, eight pages, partly printed and portions in script, contain what is described as "The Church Covenant of a Society of Christians Baptized upon profession of faith, usually meeting at Newbury."

These Articles were read over at a Church meeting held on September 25th, 1775, and duly approved by the Pastor, and signed in the book by eight members and five non-members. The practice of appending six or seven signatures

to the minutes of meetings was a customary procedure at this period, while persons who could not write placed their cross.



FIRST KNOWN MEETING ROOM (Upper Storey)

Doubts have sometimes been expressed regarding the date of the Church's formation. All available records consulted however give the origin 1640. The Baptist Magazine 1826, refers to the first meetings of the newly formed Association of Churches held that year at Newbury at which meetings the date above given was mentioned.

The writer also possesses two letters addressed to his late father fifty years ago by two eminent authorities, both of whom agree as to the given date of formation. As in many other places it is almost certain that local Baptists met in various houses prior to their existence as an organised Body.

It is recorded that "they gathered together in ye house of one, Thomas Merriman," the location of which is not known. The first Minister of whom we have any information was Mr. James. He preached to a small company in an upper room of the fine old gabled house in Northbrook Street now occupied by Messrs. Camp Hopson & Sons. At that time the occupier was Mr. Jabez Hill, Grocer.

We are told that much suffering was experienced at the time of the Civil War 1643-4, and during the period when soldiers of Charles' Army were quartered in the town. The ministry of Mr. James appears to have been much blessed; and the membership increased to about fifty.

It was now found necessary to either rent or build a larger meeting place. Located in Northcroft Lane, or Egypt, as this place was designated, was a plot of freehold land 63 ft. x 40 ft., which was purchased for eighteen pounds. The date of the abstract from title deeds is June 3rd and 4th, 1702. A Meeting House was erected upon this site, and is still used as a place of worship by the Brethren.

Mr. James remained as Pastor until his decease, a period of about sixty years. His remains were interred near where the pulpit used to be situated. For a while the services were continued with various supplies until about 1716, when Mr. Jefferies of Taunton was invited to the Pastorate. Mr. Jefferies' granddaughter married Mr. Caleb Evans who was minister at Broadmead, Bristol, when James Bicheno came to Newbury.

We read that the ministry of Mr. Jefferies was very fruitful and he baptised about fifty people during his stay of five years. Among this number was Mary Chesterman whom he baptised in 1718. This worthy woman was in membership sixty-four years, and to her good memory we are indebted for this early account.

When the minister of the Taunton Church died, Mr. Jefferies who had been his assistant, returned to that place to become its Pastor. We learn that his departure from Newbury was greatly deplored, as he was much beloved and respected.

The membership was now about 100 and the Church in a promising state, but after Mr. Jefferies' departure a decline was experienced. To an un-named minister who settled for a time, this falling off was attributed. We read that "several substantial families were drawn toward Arminius and Arius, and who, on such a change, attended the Presbyterian Meeting House." This picturesque old Building is now the Unitarian Church situated along the waterside. It is the oldest Nonconformist place of Worship in the town and was erected in 1697.

About the year 1730, Mr. Britten was for a short time the Pastor, but receiving an invitation to Whitchurch his acceptable ministry at Newbury terminated. The next Pastor, Mr. Taylor remained a few years, after which he became a Presbyterian, and removed to a London Church. Several ministers succeeded him, of whom very little is known. Mr. Widgery ministered to the Church for a limited period, and removing to Bampton, Devon, was followed by Mr. E. Harrison. The latter stayed a few years, leaving to become an assistant to Mr. Bernard Foskett, Pastor of Broadmead, Bristol.

For some years the Church was without a Pastor, and various members led the worship in regular rotation. Mr. Harrison returned to Newbury and took up the work again, remaining a few years; but owing to unsatisfactory conduct was obliged to resign.

One is unable to trace any reference to Mr. Harrison in the Broadmead, Bristol records (Hanserd Knolleys 1847) but several references are made to Mr. Foskett. For some time the services were sustained by various members taking part, and by the reading of printed sermons.

This must have been about 1740, the year when John Wesley formed his separate society of seventy-five members at the famous Foundry in Windmill Street, London; and also paid his first visit to Newbury, preaching in the Parish Church on February 3rd.

Living at Warminster was a former and much respected member of the Church, Mr. Wilkins. This gentleman had retired from business, and being free was invited to return to Newbury to take charge of the Church. Because of his burning zeal for the cause of Christ, this worthy man worked and gave of his best to the cause for seven years, when he returned to Warminster. As he was a layman, the sacraments were administered as occasion demanded by Mr. Bezley from the Wantage Church.

Probationary preachers now supplied the pulpit until 1748, when Mr. Francis Lewis became the settled minister.

A sorry decline seems to have set in at this time, and little of an encouraging nature can be reported. Reading through the lines, one cannot help admiring the way Mr. Lewis stuck to a difficult task, while receiving little financial support. Twenty years of his ministry passed and then a revival is registered. The numbers increased, and an effort to pull together was evident. The meeting house had become shabby and needed many repairs, so the work of restoration was undertaken. The Pastor made wide appeals and collected £154 toward the necessary work, only £18 of this being obtained in Newbury.

There is a curious sentence here which has been overwritten with many flourishes, probably by the same pen which wrote it. One is able to decipher the following however." The subscription for the minister for some years was not more than ten shillings and sixpence annually: but from Christmas, 1770 to 1771, it was three pounds eighteen shillings and ninepence" We are not informed regarding any further emolument to Mr. Lewis; nor is he stated to have had private income; but this is more than probable.

In 1774, through misunderstanding and difficulty within the Church the Pastor felt compelled to resign. He continued to hold services in his own house, and some of the Church members attended there. This same year a piece of ground adjoining the Church was acquired for a burial ground, the purchase price being thirty pounds. Egypt, and the vicinity of the Church must have been affected by the serious flood at this time.

In an old diary kept by S. Purdue (of which the writer has a written copy) occurs the following note for 1774. "Sunday ye 6th day of March, it began to rain and did continue until ye eleventh day, and then began to be windy and frosty. It was ye greatest flood ever known in these parts, and the river did reach as far as ye belfry tower, and as high as ye Globe bridge." After Mr. Lewis separated from the Church, students from Bristol supplied the pulpit until the Spring of 1776, when Mr. Stephens took charge and remained for two years.

In August 1779, a reconciliation place between Mr. Lewis and the Church, and he again took charge of the work. The re-union only lasted six months for he died the following January 1780. After his decease, Mr. Timothy Thomas supplied the pulpit for a brief period.

Having completed his studies at Bristol College, and served the Falmouth Church for about eighteen months, Rev. James Bicheno, M.A., was strongly recommended by Bristol ministers to the Newbury Church. He came to preach in April, 1780, bearing a written recommendation from the Falmouth Church, commencing, "To whom these presents may concern, this is to certify that the bearer hereof . . ." etc.

Although couched in formal terms this letter paid a high tribute to the character and attainments of young Bicheno. At a Church meeting held on 28th May, 1780 it was "Agreed as essential to ye interests of ye Church" that an invitation be given to the Pastorate. Headed by Joseph Somerset Nias, the book is signed by fifty-one members and subscribers. It is a curious collection of autographs and many of the names are mis-spelt.

James Bicheno's early years after leaving school, were extremely adventurous and colourful, and some of his experiences are related in Hall and Marsh's local history. James Bicheno was born in the village of Over, in Cambridgeshire, and when about 16 years old he wandered from home with the object of finding work; eventually arriving in London. While walking one day in the street, in search of work, he encountered a well known crimp of the Government, who at that time decoyed men into the Army and Naval services.

This man was the famous Crispe who is mentioned by Goldsmith in his "Vicar of Wakefield" as having trepanned the Vicar's son. Gaining the confidence of young Bicheno, Crispe somehow persuaded him to board a boat bound for Virginia, North America. On arrival there he was sold as a slave to a colonel who was a member of the Council of State. Because of his known educational advantage he was employed as tutor to the children of the family.

Having to live amongst the common slaves caused him much suffering at first, but before long James Bicheno was recognised for his worth and won for himself a place among the family. Here, he remained for two years or more, making full use in the meantime of the added advantage of access to his master's library.

He finally found means of conveying a message to his friends in the Mother country, and they immediately arranged to redeem him. Upon return to England he was placed at college, where he qualified for the ministry; and as we have stated, went first to Falmouth, after which he accepted a call to Newbury.

Mr. Bicheno became the author of a number of sacred historical and religious works, and for his writings received his master's degree from an American University. The following is an abbreviated list of some of Mr. Bicheno's publications, which at the time provoked considerable controversy. "The destiny of the German Empire, or an attempt to ascertain the Apocalyptic Dragon." "The Signs of the Times." "A call to Britain, to stand prepared for the consequence of the present War." "An Estimate of Peace." "Preparation for the coming of Christ." "A History of Christianity and English Nonconformity." "Brief History of the Jews," etc.

In referring to Mr. Bicheno, Rev. S. M. Roberts makes mention of a curious statement contained in the introduction to Cobbins' condensed Scripture Commentary. It is as follows- "Among the, fallible, curious and opposite specimens

of modern prophets professing to derive their predictions from this Book, two may be mentioned, Rev. James Bicheno, M.A., a highly respectable Baptist minister who positively foretold the downfall of popery and despotism 1819; and Dr. Warmsley, a Roman Catholic Divine of Bath who published a work in 1771, in which he demonstrated that Protestantism is the Grand Apostasy, and was to be extirpated in 1825." Mr. Roberts adds "We may therefore at least congratulate ourselves on having had a notably learned, even if humanly fallible ancestor."

In 1806 Mr. Erskine, the Lord Chancellor, presented Mr. Bicheno with his portrait. For twenty-seven years, until March 1807, Mr. Bicheno remained in the pastorate, when failing health and stress of work was the reason for his resignation.

In addition to Pastoral work in the Church Mr. Bicheno kept a boarding school for young gentlemen near the railway station in the building known as Greenham House. This was acquired a few years ago by the Corporation and now serves the useful purpose of a Clinical Centre.



OLD BAPTIST MEETING HOUSE, NORTHCROFT

The old grounds surrounding it form a small but pleasant Public Garden which is well kept. To a tired walker tarrying a while within its shade comes that comfortable feeling brought about by the blending of old timber and turf. Mr. Bicheno remained in association with the Newbury Church for some years then removed to Coate, returning to Newbury in 1820.

Four years later he had a stroke and suffered until his decease in 1831. His death occurred at the house adjoining St. Joseph's Hall now occupied by the Roman Catholic Priest.

Here we would insert a brief reference to Mrs. Bicheno, who so ably assisted her husband in his work. This gifted lady must have had a busy and useful life; but the only reference we can find is eloquent enough, and is in the form of an obituary notice in the Baptist Magazine 1814, a portion of which we quote, "On January 11th, after some months of suffering, died at Aston Parsonage, near Witney, aged 65, Mrs. Ann Bicheno, late of Newbury ... The sorrow of relations on such occasions is the common tribute which nature pays to the most undistinguished virtues; but on this occasion not only the sorrow of relatives, but the gratitude of a thousand youths, who in the course of the last twenty-five years experienced the maternal attentions of this worthy woman bears testimony to her many superior excellencies. Her kind solicitude for their welfare will long be remembered."

Strangely enough we have but scanty information regarding the state of the Church during the ministry of Mr. Bicheno. The minute book reveals that soon after his settlement he was journeying to and fro to London and Braintree in all effort to secure a settlement of a dispute regarding a legacy of £500, left under the will of Mrs. Cox.

There was a long chancery suit which did not terminate until 1804. The Church lost the whole of the money which was more than swallowed up in legal charges and costs. Rather severe discipline was exercised within the Church for many years, members and deacons too, coming under ye censure of ye Church were dealt with in "Church way".

The minister was thorough and businesslike and brought orderly conduct into the affairs of the Church. Accounts appear for the first time and are quaint reading. "Ye Church was very poore" at this time and the quarterly subscription to the Pastor averaged about £1 2s. 6d. These were indeed hard times. War was being waged on the Continent; and food riots occurred in London, and elsewhere. We learn from the local diarist, before mentioned, that bread rose to 3/5d. per gallon loaf.

Candles and the cost of letters seemed to be the chief items of expenditure, while fuel, faggots and turpentine were relatively cheap. The glazier is frequently referred to, so we gather that there was some wilful breaking of windows around Egypt.

It is worthy of note here that the Newbury Church has always maintained a strong interest remained in foreign missions. In turning up the original published accounts of the Baptist Missionary Society 1800 we find that the Pastor and others gave liberal support to the newly formed mission. Among well-known Newbury names on the subscribers list were Toomer, Bunny, James, Friend, Graham, Winter, Hedges, Edge, Rollo, etc.

In February, 1805, a public appeal was made and the Meeting House was thoroughly restored and a wall built around the burial ground. The cost is given as being. £237 19s. 9¼d. Mr. Bicheno now expressed a wish to relinquish the Pastorate as soon as a suitable successor was appointed.

It so happened that Mr. John Perry, of Brockenhurst, Hants (who had been preaching at Malmesbury, Wilts for twelve months) was visiting a nephew who was at Mr. Bicheno's school. This led to Mr. Perry's introduction to the Church and his appointment as Assistant Pastor for eighteen months.

His subsequent ordination took place in September, 1807. During his pastorate he seems to have devoted special service to the village stations; and also to the children of the Church. In 1810 Annual Church meetings were instituted when it was agreed to call them " at ye beginning of ye year."

A quaint entry in the book at this time (1811) reads "We decide that no person or persons be permitted put a lock or locks on any pew or pews, and any placed thereon to be taken off." When Mr. Perry had been at Newbury 4½ years he contracted a serious illness which caused his death six months later. He died on November 24th, 1812, and was buried in the Meeting House the following Sunday.

We give the following extracts from the Baptist Magazine 1813, which better enables us to estimate the character of Mr. Perry. Born at Fareham, Hants, 1759, he was at an early age placed under the care of Rev. Bowden, of Tooting, Surrey. His father was captain of a small coasting vessel, and young Perry often sailed with him around the rugged English coast sharing the dangers of the sea.

At 14 years of age he was apprenticed to an uncle at Lymington, Hants, and attended with him the Baptist Church at which Mr. Stradling was pastor. John Perry was baptised in 1778, and after taking a useful part in Church work he removed to Brockenhurst five miles distant, where he took charge of the work. While carrying on his business he also preached in the villages around, and for many years (though not strong) he travelled about 18 miles every other Sunday taking services in three different places.

At Burly, a meeting house was built through his influence. Mr. Perry would sometimes sail across to Yarmouth, I. of W. and preach in the surrounding districts. He received no remuneration for his work and paid his own expenses out of his business earnings. In 1804 Mr. Perry relinquished business and accepted the call for twelve months to the Church at Malmesbury, Wilts, after which (as we have before stated) he visited Newbury, and became Assistant Pastor with Mr. Bicheno.

It is stated at Newbury, Mr. Perry preached four sermons a week, yet found time frequently, to visit the villages until his physical strength failed him. When lying in weakness and great pain, and asked how he was, he would reply " Helpless, but blessed be God, not hopeless, Christ is more than sufficient."

After Mr. Perry's decease, the Church was also destitute of Deacons, so on Sunday, December 14th, 1812, a ballot vote was taken resulting in John Elkins and John Sargent being appointed. Having resigned the pastorate of Lynn, Norfolk, Mr. Thomas Welsh was led to Newbury, through the recommendation of Dr. Ryland, and he settled in October, 1813. The following year John Sargent was set aside to preach in the villages around Newbury, being supported by special prayer meetings at Newbury.

The Church greatly increased in membership at this time, and as enlargement of the Meeting House was, undertaken in the summer of 1815, meetings were held in the Town Hall until the re-opening in November, The special services then held mark the formation of an Association of four Berkshire Churches, viz: Reading, Newbury, Wokingham and Wallingford, with a view to others coming in later.

A member of this Church, Thomas Godden, was accepted for missionary work and subsequently went to Jamaica. His designation took place at Frome in 1818, an account of which appears in the Baptist Magazine for September of that year. Mr. Samuel Whitewood, a member of the Newbury Church, after a course at Stepney Academy, was ordained Pastor of the newly formed Church at Andover, Hants.

A curious register of members is preserved, written up by the Pastor which gives women members on one side of the page, and men on the opposite side. Their occupations are also stated showing many were still engaged in the cloth and weaving trade. Other occupations mentioned are, Broom Maker, Boat Builder, Brewer, Paper Maker, Cutler, Straw Bonnet Maker, etc.

A singular admission to the Church at this time was an applicant for membership who when giving the usual testimony stated the following facts.

He was a labourer from Newtown; and prior to conversion claimed to have been very ignorant and fond of bad company. Now, however, he could read and write, and for this he was indebted to an African black servant who was employed by General Cockell. This negro had taught himself, and considered every Christian should be so enlightened that he could read his Bible.

In 1831 a statement occurs to the effect that a Clothing Society having existed at Chieveley for some years, it was decided to form a similar one in the Church for the benefit of the poor.

The successful ministry of Mr. T. S. Welsh extended over a period of twenty-six years, until March, 1839, when he resigned. During this lengthy pastorate he kept a faithful record in the minute book of the meetings. After the last entry, he wrote " I hereby certify that every entry in my handwriting has been made with a constant regard to truth and accuracy."

That Mr. Welsh was held in high esteem, is indicated by the fact that a public subscription was made to provide an annuity of £25. Some months later he years removed to Uxbridge. In several village districts, places of worship were erected and to these we will refer later. Mr. Welsh had the joy of baptising three daughters and one son while at Newbury.

His son, John Sutcliff Welsh, after preaching in the villages for a time, entered Stepney College for ministerial training. James Ebenezer Bicheno, F.S.L., was the notable son of Rev. J. Bicheno, M.A. He joined the Church a year after Rev. Welsh settled in 1814 at Newbury, subsequently removing to London, but retaining his membership until 1838.

In 1817, Mr. Bicheno wrote a book relating to Poor Law. In 1821 he married Miss Floyd, who died within twelve months. The following year he was appointed Secretary of the Linnean Society, which office he retained for seven

years. Among other works, he assisted in publishing "Illustrations of Ornithology" in 1830; while his "Herbarium" is in the Swansea Public Museum. In September, 1842, Mr. J. E. Bicheno was posted as Colonial Secretary to Van Dieman's Land.

He rendered very creditable service in this capacity and appears to have been much esteemed by the Australian Colonists. His death took place on February 25th, 1851, at Hobart. We now come to the close of the second century of the Church's history and find it to be in a healthy condition. In July, 1839, Rev. J. B. Pike from the first Baptist Church in Boston, became the next minister. He had been ordained just three years before; and in Newbury for five years.

His father, Rev. J. G. Pike, of Derby, was the author of "Persuasions to early Piety." This minister took the Sunday School Anniversary Services in 1840, the bi-centenary year of the Church; the date almost coinciding with the introduction of the penny adhesive postage stamps.

We notice that this year a discussion took place regarding the "propriety of adopting the principle of open communion." In July, 1844, Mr. Pike tendered his resignation, and was succeeded by Rev. D. Trotman. Mr. Trotman was advanced in years, and owing to increasing infirmity resigned the pastorate the following Year in favour of Rev. Joseph Drew of Whitchurch.

Two years after his settlement, the question of open communion was again discussed and on November 4th, 1847, it was decided that "we, therefore hereafter admit to fellowship of the Lord's table members of anti-Baptist Churches provided such members stand on honourable terms with the Churches to which they belong."

On November 2nd, 1849, a note reads "It is agreed that tea shall be provided in the vestry on ordinance days for country members who have walked long distances; the expenses to be defrayed out of money collected at the Lord's table."

Benjamin Higgs died aged 100: he joined the Church in 1785, thus being in membership 65 years.

Mr. N. Knight left the Newbury Church to take up work in London as a City Missioner.

Consideration was given to the question of building a new Church and at a special meeting two committees were formed "one of males and one of females", to collect funds. In July, 1850, a tea meeting was held in the Mansion House in aid of the building fund.

The next step was taken in April, 1857, when a Building Committee was formed to seek a suitable site and secure plans and specifications for a new place of worship. A site in Northbrook Street was secured at auction on May 21st, 1858, for the sum of £930; the nominal purchaser being Mr. Henry Flint. Within a fortnight trustees were appointed, the plans completed, and passed at a Church meeting in October, and the same month the foundation was laid. Nine months later on July 2nd, 1859, the new Church was opened for worship. The total cost including purchase of site was approximately £3,000.

Ministers attending the opening celebrations were Rev. Wm. Brock, of Bloomsbury, Rev. C. Vince, of Birmingham, and Rev. J. J. Brown. Three months later a Bazaar was held, by which £100 was realised. We notice that once the way was clear the building scheme was developed and completed with wonderful speed. The schoolroom was built mainly of material salvaged from the old house demolished on the site.



NORTHBROOK STREET CHURCH

An unusual feature within the Church was the entire absence of pillars to support the gallery. A source of attraction too was a massive circular gas chandelier suspended from the centre of the glass dome. This contained no less than 62 gas jets. Mr. Drew closed his pastorate after receiving an invitation to Trinity Road, Halifax, in July, 1864.

His successor, two months later, was Rev. Thos. M. Roberts, BA., who came from Aldborough, Suffolk. There is little to record regarding the work of the Church during Mr. Roberts' brief stay at Newbury. Soon after his settlement he sensed certain opposition which seemed to hinder his work and he resigned after just two years in the pastorate.

We give two brief extracts from the minutes (kept by Mr. Roberts) for 1866. "The use of Baptistry, and vestments were granted to Plymouth Brethren to baptise candidates of their own persuasion." March 2nd, "It was agreed to unite with our Congregational friends in their schoolroom on the 9th inst., for special prayer for removal of 'Cattle Plague'." The old Meeting House in Northcroft was now sold for £200.

In 1924, at the writer's request, Mr. Joseph Miller for many years a deacon at Northbrook' Street) dictated his recollections of the old Meeting House as far back as 1851. To his nephew Mr. F. Pocock, of Wokingham, we are indebted for taking down these notes.

We learn that the Baptistry in the Northcroft building was in the centre, and candidates after immersion had to walk to the rear end. The back gallery was used for the Sunday School, which met at 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. Also at the rear end of the building were sliding partitions which were opened for public worship.

The pews were high backed; and some were covered with green baize and studded with brass nails. Most of the ladies wore wooden pattens, or clogs, and as the aisles were of stone the clatter made on assembling for worship may be imagined. The Officers of the Church therefore placed a notice at the entrance "Please remove your pattens at the door."

Mr. Miller's grandfather, James Miller, Senr., led the singing, using a tuning fork to set the pitch. What was considered at this time a very good string band accompanied the singing, and when in later years a harmonium was introduced, quite a commotion was caused. Upon the termination of the Crimean War in June, 1856, the scholars of the Sunday School (with their banners) joined with other schools in a street procession, halting in the Market Place for dinner.

After poring over hundreds of pages of faded script, some of which is scarcely decipherable we suddenly come to clear bold handwriting produced with quill pen and fadeless violet ink. This marks the commencement of Rev. J. E. Cracknell's ministry in April, 1867.

A few months after Mr. Cracknell's settlement the harmonium, brought from the old Meeting House, was replaced by a pipe organ which was erected in the small gallery at the back of the pulpit. The organist then was Mr. Henry Flint. The gallery was removed in 1901 when a new organ, by Martin & Coate, of Oxford, was installed. This organ is in use at the present time.

In the accounts set out for 1867 we observe that the pew-openers' salaries amounted to £7 13s. 1d. On September 12th and 14th 1869, the Preachers engaged for the Anniversary are stated to have been Mr. Spurgeon, Senr. and Rev. J. Drew; the collections on this occasion amounting to £26. In 1871, the Church closed for five weeks for repairs and renovations, and was, when re-opened, free of all debt.

This caused great rejoicing, and at the next annual Church meeting, tea and music were provided and addresses given by Brethren Coxeter, Davies, Terry and Josey. After prayers of thanksgiving for "Peace" the proceedings ended with the singing of "God bless the Prince of Wales." Mr. Cracknell resigned in April, 1873, transferring to South Shields Tabernacle. Having made it his constant concern, he did not leave the Church until it was entirely freed from debt.

Rev. F. Robertson, after serving the Church for six months received almost unanimous invitation to Pastorate. His stay, however, was cut short owing to an unfortunate state of affairs arising the following year. The question at issue was a proposal to provide unfermented wine for use at Communion Services, a matter which would have arisen sooner or later.

A vote was taken which revealed a small majority in favour of the adoption of the use of unfermented wine. As certain deacons and other members tried to override this decision further dissension arose, details of which are best left unrecorded. We mention this because in fairness to the memory of Mr. Robertson it should be stated that while he was forced to resign by those who were pledged to support him, he acted throughout with perfect fairness, and no possible reflection could be cast upon his Christian character.

Those members who now felt unable to worship freely at Northbrook Street, formed a separate Church which for 5½ years met at the Temperance Hall, with Mr. Robertson as Pastor.

Shortly after this secession of more than thirty staunch members, Rev. George Howe, from Rugby, received an invitation to Northbrook Street. In June of the following year, he introduced the weekly offering envelope system. The Church suffered the loss by death of the Senior Deacon, Mr. Henry Flint, in January, 1879. He was in membership 53 years, and a deacon for nearly forty years.

By an entry for November, 1876, we learn that Mrs. Coxeter, aged 102 years, was called Home. As a girl of fourteen she had heard John Wesley preach at Witney.

In January, 1880 there was a happy reunion of the two parts of the divided Church. The Temperance Hall services had been well attended, and both the memberships of the Church and Sunday School were increasing. The deacons from Northcroft retained their offices thus doubling the diaconate to eight ; while the increase of teachers and scholars created problems in the Sunday School.

It was soon evident that a new impetus had been given to the work. Increased accommodation was badly needed and at a special meeting a committee was appointed to deal with the matter. The officers, together with Messrs. Sellwood and W. E. Lewendon were empowered to act, and Mr. A. Jackson served as treasurer to the building fund. An extra floor was added to the schoolroom thus giving three more rooms above. The iron pillar supporting the main beam will be remembered as a sore temptation to boys who shinned up it to the ceiling to have a slide down the

"greasy pole." The cost of this additional space amounted to £320, and towards this a sum of £160 was realised by a three days bazaar held in the Town Hall.

The centenary of Sunday Schools was celebrated on June 27th, 1880. Scholars of the Local Free Churches united and altogether with adults held services in the Corn Exchange. The following Tuesday a remarkable gathering of nearly 3,000 proceeded to the station and entrained for an outing to Barton Court.

In November, 1881 Mr. J. W. Davies joined the Church. After leaving Newbury he subsequently entered Spurgeon's College, afterwards taking up the work at South Lee Baptist Church, London, in 1886. The Church had only been established 12 years, but before long a Tabernacle was built. Mr. Davies had a remarkable ministry, remaining in the same Pastorate for 44 years, until his death in 1930. To occupy the pulpit at Newbury was always a delight to him, and he would enjoy recalling his youthful experiences in the Newbury Sunday School. In 1884, Mr. Howes' ministry terminated and he left Newbury, his death occurring five years later.

Rev. Elias George, formerly at the Faringdon Church accepted a call to Newbury in the Spring of 1885. Within two months of the new Pastor's settlement the Church building had been renovated at a cost of £145. The work had taken five weeks, during which period successful services were held in the Town Hall. The re-opening service was conducted by Rev. Charles Spurgeon and the evening service constituted Mr. George's public recognition.

During the closing months of 1885, twenty-seven candidates were baptised and the membership increased by forty. This year a thorough revision of the roll was undertaken. We notice mentioned for the first time Midsummer morning and Watch night services. In 1886 a Church Secretary was elected, Mr. P. E. Davies being appointed.

A note for February of this year reads " Our beloved brother Benjamin Freeman was called Home at the advanced age of 101 ; he was as the shock of corn fully ripe."

During the year of the Queen's Jubilee the Church pump refused to function and the town water was laid on. It was decided to start arrangements for the holding of an " Olde English Faire " in order to liquidate the debt on the renovation fund. This ambitious effort necessitated the hiring of the Corn Exchange for several days.

We learn from a quaintly worded handbill that "Ye olde English Market would be holden on ye 22nd, 23rd, and 24th dayes of October, 1888 (Godde willinge). " Ye olde style houses contayning ye wares were attended by Faire Ladyes in Puritan dress; and ye people were entertayned with sweet musicke." This effort realised £256.

The same month Mr. George's brief but fruitful ministry closed at Newbury. He then took up secretarial work with the British and Foreign Bible Society, a post he filled with great efficiency.

Late in life Mr. George suffered the loss of a leg, but continued his work of itineration on behalf of the Bible Society.



NORTHBROOK STREET CHURCH, INTERIOR

After an interval of six months, an invitation to the Pastorate accepted by Rev. G. J. Knight, then at Weymouth, and he settled in May, 1889. In 1890, Mr. Jackman, who had proved his worth in village work, was warmly recommended for entry to Spurgeon's College and he was accepted for training with a view to taking up Missionary work on the Congo. Mr. A. Jackson a deacon, was elected to the Mayoral Office in 1891.

Upon the resignation of Mr. P. F. Davies as church secretary and choirmaster, Mr. W. J. Davies was elected to these offices, serving also as Sunday School superintendent. When later he removed to Reading, Mr. Clayton succeeded him as secretary in 1899, Mr. Mac F. Davies became choirmaster, and Mr. Fred Pocock honorary organist; a post he held for twenty-five years.

After a connection with the Church since 1848, Mr. J. J. Davies, a deacon, greatly esteemed, died in 1901. Although suffering physical affliction for many years he continued to render useful service of passive resistance to the Church. This same year a new organ was installed by Messrs. Martin & Coate, of Oxford, at a cost of nearly £220. To accommodate the organ the choir gallery was removed; and the pulpit reduced in size.

Upon Mr. Clayton's removal from Newbury, Mr. Mac Davies became Church secretary in 1903. This office he filled faithfully for thirty years. The Mayor elected this year, Mr. W. E. Lewendon, J.P. was a Church member, and an ardent temperance worker. Four days celebrations were held in Centenary May, 1903 in connection with the Sunday School Centenary; Mr. A. Jackson being superintendent at this period. Those taking part were Rev. J. W. Davies, a former scholar; Mr. W. J. Davies, former scholar and superintendent; Rev. E. George, and Rev. Chas. Brown.

In April, 1907 Mr. T M. Nias, the senior, deacon passed away at the age of 79, after 32 years in this office. Mr. Nias whose membership dated back to 1847, served as a Sunday School teacher and local preacher. He was a stalwart in the temperance cause and did useful pioneer work in the Newbury district. During 1908 the Pastor suffered a period of ill health, and in October offered his resignation. He gave nearly twenty years of devoted service to the Church. After leaving Newbury, Mr. Knight became the minister of the Church at Minehead. It will be remembered that following the unjust Education Act of 1902, Mr. Knight took the line of passive resistance; being fully prepared to suffer the penalty of the law for his principles.

The Church was now without a minister for a year. At this point we pause for a moment, realising that the happenings of the years that follow are too fresh in the memory for the writer to indulge in descriptive detail. When the story of these thirty years is fully written it will not be the least worthy period of the Church's history; but for the present we content ourselves with a mere précis.

On November 7th, 1909, the Jubilee year of the opening of Northbrook Street Church, Rev. C. V. Pike, formerly of Amptill, received a five years invitation to the Pastorate. His notable ministry at Newbury extended to sixteen years, after which he accepted a call to West Hartlepool, remaining there until his recent retirement from the Pastorate, when he returned to reside, in the Royal County.

On the first Sunday in 1928, Rev. Johnson, then a student at Spurgeon's College took the place of another student deputed to preach at Newbury. This visit resulted in a Student pastorate of brief duration at Newbury, and an invitation in May to the full time ministry.

Mr. Johnson maintained a happy and successful ministry of nearly six years when he responded to an invitation to Camden Road, London.

Following an interregnum of a few months, the present pastor, Rev. A. J. Stanton, was invited, and commenced his ministry in May, 1934. He is the twenty-fifth in the Pastoral Office. During this same month, on the 30th the new School Building was opened by our esteemed Sunday School superintendent, Mr. A. P. Morton. On July 26th, 1939, the stone-laying ceremony in connection with the new Church was held, the commemoration stone being laid by Mrs. Wm. Davies.

We now look forward to a special day in the history of the Church, when on September 18th, 1940 the new Church Building adjoining the School Hall is to be opened by the Senior Deacon, Mr. Thos. S. Waite. The whole of the building work has been worthily executed by one of our deacons, Mrs Arthur Chivers. In reviewing the Past we give humble and grateful thanks to God, and looking forward, take courage as we start a new chapter in our Church's history.

A little Christian Community was founded three centuries ago. A fire was kindled which has sometimes burned brightly, and at other periods become a faint flicker; but neither the cold water of persecution nor the dark days of difficulty, have quenched the flame. To our young people especially is entrusted the task of keeping the fire aglow; by, earnestly taking up the work as others lay it down. May they with Whittier "Stand in their Place, and testify To coming ages, long, That truth is stronger than a lie, And righteousness, than wrong."

This brief history would be incomplete without some account of the establishment of our Village Churches. The earliest reference we can find in our records regarding evangelistic work in the country districts is contained in the minutes of a meeting held on February 2nd, 1815 This reads:-"Our brother John Sargent has been led, and it is hoped by providence, to speak with acceptance several times in the villages from portions of Scripture." Upon this it was unanimously resolved " that our Brother be requested to speak from a portion of God's Word, before the Church for the approbation of the Brethren with a view to the continuance of this good work, and its more frequent exercise." After hearing Mr. Sargent speak at several services the Church unanimously agreed, " that we do encourage him to continue to spread the name of Christ wherever God shall give him opportunity."

This good man united with the Church in 1811, was elected a deacon, and for 27 years consistently served the Baptist cause in Newbury and the surrounding area until his decease in 1838. Other preachers were appointed in the year 1828 when we read that "within the last year the number of labourers in the villages having been diminished Messrs. B. Long, H. Flint and W. Ruddy supplied the lack, their efforts being acceptable."

VILLAGE STATIONS

We will give brief particulars of the beginnings of the village Churches using in part some notes compiled by Rev. J. E. Cracknell in 1872.

The first Chapel built was at Berries Bank.

A cottage occupied by Jacob Gore had been licensed for preaching in the beginning of the year 1822, and in May the following year the Pastor reported " that the cottage was too small, both for the people who met for public worship and the children who came to be instructed."

It was further stated that as Rev. Thomas Durant, Pastor of the Independent Chapel of Poole, was the proprietor of land near the spot, he was written to. The following is an extract of his reply: " My dear Sir, You are at perfect liberty to have as much of the land as you want, without money and without price."

Having received such a generous offer it is rather surprising that the Church Officers claimed such a modest enclosure upon which to build their little Bethel. Having started a subscription list towards the cost of a building the work was soon begun. On June 13th, 1823, the Chapel was opened for Divine worship. The Pastor, Rev. Welsh, together with Rev. Dryland (Pastor of the Congregational Church) preached the opening sermons.

About the year 1813 preaching services and a Sunday School were started at the house of Mr. Pocock. As numbers increased the accommodation was insufficient. Early in 1833, Mr. Pocock gave a piece of land upon which to build a place of worship. On July 4th, the same year, the sum of £60 was reported to have been raised at Long Lane towards

the cost of the building. The Chapel was opened on August 2nd, 1833 the preachers being the Pastor, Mr. Welsh and Mr. Hinton, of Reading. The present Church was built some year, later mainly through the initiative of the late Mr. Brain, who lived for some years at Hermitage. It was opened by Mr. G. W. Palmer.

The Church is an attractive little building complete with schoolroom, vestry and kitchen. In April, 1933 successful centenary celebrations were held during Mr. Johnson's ministry. In September, 1834 a small place of worship was erected at Newtown, which was in use for some years. It was later closed, and eventually sold in 1870 on account of failing attendance.

The first reference to Headley states that " Our friend James Andrews had laboured for the Lord on Headley Common and many had been aroused to assemble for the worship of God." This good man owing to an impediment in his speech had been requested to discontinue preaching from the village pulpits. His cottage meetings increased so that a tent was erected nearby.

When later James Andrews left the district, the Newbury Church took over the work. Mr. Gale, a member at Newbury, gave a piece of land for building purposes and in the Autumn Of 1838, Rev. Welsh opened a building for public worship.

In 1924 during Rev. C. V. Pike's pastorate, a former scholar in the Headley Sunday School gave a generous gift to encourage the movement for a new Church. The Present Church and schoolroom was opened for worship in February, 1925 at a cost of £1,200. In March, 1936, the centenary services were well attended, and taking part on the Wednesday were two former Pastors, Rev. C. V. Pike and Rev. W. C. Johnson, together with the present minister.

As in the other villages, cottage gatherings in Ashmore Green were held prior to the building of a meeting place. For about eleven years meetings were held in the cottage of Mrs. Willoughby. Mr. Clayton and other friends conducted these meetings, and also collected funds for a place of worship which was erected in 1806. Three years later the Church was put in trust for the Newbury Church and was regularly supplied with preachers.

Each country Church could tell its own story of faithful men and women who have carried on the work; and of the loyal laymen who have given consecrated service in carrying the Gospel message into their pulpits.

Many, have passed on but are still remembered, and others with a long and worthy record of service are still maintaining the work.