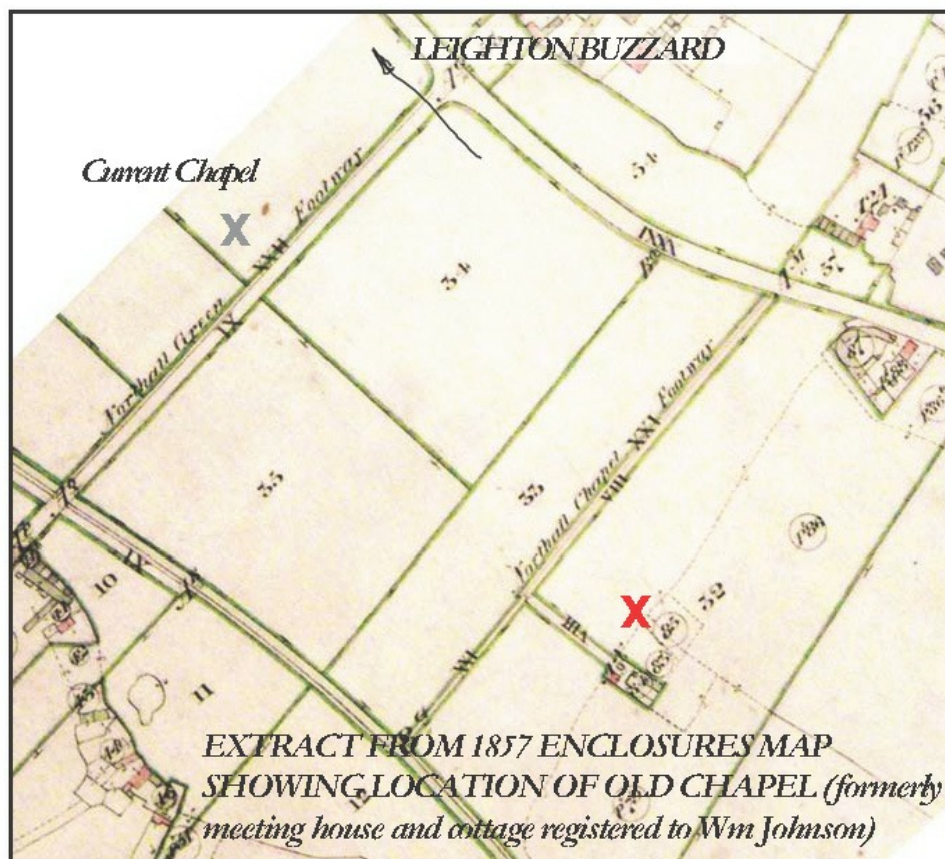




***NORTHALL BAPTIST CHURCH
1802-2012***

REBELS IN GREEN PASTURES



INTRODUCTION

The evocative title to the history of Northall Baptist, 'Rebels in Green Pastures', was coined by Derek Yirrell to go with the 'ups and downs' in the early existence of, and happenings in, our Church. Having recorded the salient points from the earliest of times, gleaned from the Chapel's Minute books and other documents, Derek observed in 1996 that only God could provide the wherewithal for the Church to continue; He did.

In 2002, the remaining few at Northall Baptist had seen their prayers answered; that help had been offered and accepted; that preaching of the Gospel in Northall would continue and that the Church would celebrate its 200th Anniversary after all.

Over the past year a number of Members have had it in mind to extend this booklet to record the events and happenings from 2002 to 2012. How easy it is to forget! There has been much to praise God for and we pray that He will further enable the extension of His Kingdom through His people here.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

As he paced the floor of his cottage home William Johnson muttered angrily to himself. Already he was composing a response to the letter that lay open on the table. The phrases still echoed in his mind: "*....that you receive the censure of this Meeting for past neglect and in that you fulfil your or the present plan or provide a substitute you submit to be planned by your superintendent, meet in class regularly and attend to every other branch of Methodist discipline*", and the man had the audacity to end his letter "*I am in sincerity, Yours affectionately!*"

William Johnson was christened on 3rd June 1775 in Tingewick, Bucks and by twenty-seven years of age, he was already recognised as an effective preacher among the Methodists and had

many invitations to preach. Just eleven years before, John Wesley had died, leaving many little chapels and groups of Christian believers to carry on the work.

He was eager and perhaps a little impatient to do his part. Nevertheless William Johnson was reluctant to break away from his Methodist brethren. *"If cut off from you I love sincerely may God support me, but let me give you one more discourse. I remain your servant in the Gospel at your pleasure – Wm Johnson"* His appeal to the Methodist leaders was in vain as they replied: *"Sir, you must preach at Meeting no more unless you hartiley espouse our Doctrine and Discipline or act and preach as a Methodist"*.

Like John Wesley himself, however, William Johnson claimed the right to preach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ wherever and whenever he had the opportunity and chafed at any restrictions which were placed upon him. The leaders of the Methodist Connexion were anxious to maintain discipline amongst their preachers. They had drawn up *plans* for preaching engagements and arranged for all preachers to be closely supervised to ensure that they kept to the rules of the Society. Preachers were only permitted to preach in chapels and at times as they were appointed and the leaders were not slow to impose discipline, especially upon the younger men. Any hint of rebellion would have seemed dangerous heresy at a time of much disturbance and disruption. Europe was still in a turmoil following the French Revolution some fifteen years before and George III struggled to maintain a stable kingdom whilst the shadow of Napoleon hung over the whole of Europe. Many feared the spread of revolutionary fervour into Britain.

It is unlikely however that any of this affected the peace and tranquillity of the village of Northall. Its inhabitants would be far more concerned with matters nearer home! William Johnson was a rebel, there is no doubt about that, but his rebellion stemmed from a desire to serve his Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. A small group of nineteen or twenty supporters gathered around him. They had heard him preach and admired his evident earnestness and,

young as he was, they were prepared to follow his lead in his commitment to form a new and independent church at Northall. Meetings were held at the house of a Mr. James Gadsden. News of the church spread rapidly. When they celebrated the Lord's Supper so many came from Slapton, Horton and Aston that some had to wait outside the house.

Clearly a new place of meeting had to be considered and after discussion the members decided to lease a property. Many of them were very poor; the average wage of an agricultural labourer in work was ten shillings (fifty pence in decimal currency) but the old Church Minutes Book records: *"the poor was ready to help and from among the poor we raised about twenty-five pounds and a friend laid down the rest"*. So, at a cost of ninety pounds in all they had a meeting house, which they continued to use until the summer of 1805.

Unfortunately, in that year, the leaseholder "lost his affection for the people". After some five weeks meeting in William Johnson's house they found another meeting place. They added to the property with a small house and a vestry and in 1812 decided to appoint seven trustees and purchase it as a chapel for two hundred pounds, with a debt remaining in July 1812 of seventy-seven pounds. The trustees were Richard Turney, Francis Cook, John Tarle, John Holmes, John Fenn, Joseph Downs and William Johnson. "Thus, by the help of God, we have been spared till this day of August 22nd 1812. May all our souls shout his praise. Amen".

From time to time problems arose from amongst the members. In the early days of the new church, *".... some of our brethren gave us pain for they left us and never returned - about 6 or 7"*. Discipline was strict and when differences arose over the *"fall of two members i.e. Thos Newns and Martha Leech"* another nine left, by reason of the fact that some wanted to *"spare one offending membor and sepperate the other"*. Then *"Frances Feasey was sepperated from the Church about the year 1800 for having a Basterd child swore to him"* and *"John Janes was sepperated from*

the Church about the year 1805 for Drunkenness and other bad conduct"; "Joseph Downs set aside three months for beeing intoxicated - restored again by the tender mercy of God"; "Ann Ashpool set aside three months for going against wishes of the Church and powerful operations of the Spirit of God in marreying a carnal man." This last note shows how strict the discipline was. The designation 'a carnal man' indicates that Ann's husband was not a committed Christian.

Until 1807 it seems that the church had continued as an independent Methodist Chapel but in that year a number of the members began to consider the subject of Christian Baptism. On approaching William Johnson they were told that he saw baptism as believer's baptism as practised by John and by Christ and His apostles and that no other form of baptism had been known for the first two hundred years of the life of the early church. They made further enquiries of a neighbouring minister and, as a result, twelve were baptised in that year, another two in 1808 and three more in 1809. Their names were: John and Marey Tarle, Marey Deiley, John Surcit, Ann Ashpool, Elizabeth and Ann Janes, Joseph Downs, Fanny Golding, Sarah Seir, James Tillcock, Harvey Humphrey, Elizabeth Newman, Ann Wooton, Ann Tomkins, Izaak Sayell and William Johnson himself.

Baptised members were identified in the minutes by the addition of the letter 'B' after their names and it is clear that the church members were determined to preserve a spirit of tolerance regarding this matter. *".. no membor shall ever suffer aney persicution from that ground and we desier that if Alimity God should leave us destitute of a minister, a man posessing this Libberality of sentiment may be sought.."* In the list of eighteen members on August 20th 1812 five of the members had no 'B' after their names. A further list of names which appears to have been compiled in 1815 of twenty-one members eight members had no 'B'. Discussion evidently continued for some time and seven more people left the church as a result of the decision.

On 14th October 1812 William was married to Fanny Tearle at Edelsborough. She had a son born out of wedlock in 1797, when she would have been seventeen years of age, and William was her second husband as she had married Thomas Golding in 1800. Fanny Tearle was a certified midwife and wore a red cloak. The story is told how one stormy night a man rushed to her house on horseback begging her to come to his wife who was in labour. Mounting the horse behind him they battled through the gale and safely delivered the child. After their marriage she was persuaded to give up her work as William Johnson had enough to provide for all her needs. She died in 1846 from "serous effusion 8 days" (loss of blood). In the same year William Johnson suffered another severe blow when Fanny's son, Benjamin, and his wife Charlotte joined the Church of Latter-day Saints through the influence of a Mormon preacher named Franklin D. Richards.

It is to Mormon sources that we are indebted for "family memories" of William Johnson. Evidently a man of great character he could from time to time offend more sensitive members of his congregation by his frank and direct manner. "If the shoe fits, wear it" was all he would say by way of apology. Such a saying suited him well since he had learned the trade of cobbler and was highly proficient at that trade. On one occasion he took advantage of this by announcing that on the following Sunday he would show them the best and quickest way to make a shoe. It is said that at that time Queen Victoria had been trying to encourage better shoe making and the chapel was filled to overflowing with great expectancy. He began by preaching a powerful sermon on the need for repentance. The congregation became restless and William Johnson responded by telling them that he would fulfil the promise he had made to them. He held up a boot and asked the congregation what is this? "A boot", they replied. He then picked up a knife and cut off the top of the boot. This was followed by taking a leather punch and punching the eyelets. He then asked again, "What is this?" "A shoe!" William Johnson then continued by pointing out how eager they were to learn the quickest way to make a shoe but were giving very little attention to their soul's salvation. The story

of this sermon soon became well known and the chapel was filled Sunday after Sunday to full capacity. Although we have no independent source to confirm this event it does serve to illustrate William Johnson's character and the impact of his ministry.

By the year 1812 it is clear that William Johnson was much respected in the Community. He served a one year term in Northall as Petty Constable. He also built a number of houses which were rented to his church members or work people and the rent from these and other property paid his own family living expenses and for the chapel so that it is said that he received no salary as pastor, nor required the collection plate to be passed. He was well educated for his time, having read widely as well as being a keen student of the Bible.

Benjamin built a Mormon meeting house in Eaton Bray. He had an excellent voice, and it is claimed that on one occasion the congregation emptied Northall Chapel to go to listen to Benjamin leading the Mormons in singing. William Johnson was left standing alone in the pulpit. If this is true it could only have occurred if a street meeting had been deliberately held near Northall Chapel rather than hearing the singing from Benjamin's meeting place in Eaton Bray as had been suggested since even the most powerful voice could not have carried so far.

It is also said that this was such a shock to William that he became sick. Whether this is so or not William never recovered from this illness and died on 25th February 1853. Benjamin did not long survive his father, dying in March 1853 due to a back injury caused by lifting lumber. In the terms of William Johnson's will the chapel and house adjoining were left to the Baptists for worship for one shilling per year paid to the Trustees.

Fragmentary reports in the Church records suggest that the loss of their founder and pastor were severely felt by the fellowship. A meeting was called in 1852 at which it was reported that a Mr. Woodcock *"was willing to come and preach for the amount of*

money as he had received before". That was laid before the meeting but not approved, it being said that "it was impossible to get up the money" However, it was also stated that Leighton Buzzard would supply as long as their services were desired and "John Hushpole and William Holmes were deputed to go and enter this Chappel on their plan for three or six months".

So the work of Northall Baptist Church continued. David Tearle of Houghton Regis became pastor in 1852 and served until 1859. During his pastorate more believers were baptised and received into membership. The minutes then record that *"Mr. Thomas Hart of Leighton Buzzard began his labours with us and administered the ordanance first Lord's Day in July 1860. John Vasey was baptised and received into the Church by Thomas Hart of Leighton December 2, 1860"* as was Susanah Elingham on the same occasion.

The ministry of Thomas Hart seems to have been fruitful. Hannah Cook and Sarah Vasey were baptised and received into the church in November 1861 and Joseph and Ann Room and Jabez and George Janes were similarly baptised and received into membership in January 1862. What was to be a long association evidently began in May 1862 when Jesse and Caroline Ruffett were also baptised and received into membership. An inscribed memorial in the church hall remembers that *"Jesse Ruffett born 11th February 1832; fell asleep 2nd February 1912 was a scholar of the Northall Baptist Sunday School, a valued teacher of the same for many years and also Superintendent up to the time of his being called home. This connection with the School covered a period seventy-five years"*. In addition to the above he was an original trustee of the Northall Baptist Church and served in the capacity of Deacon, Secretary and Treasurer with conspicuous faithfulness".

Church records were not always maintained but it is clear that membership in the small village chapel was subject to some fluctuation. In 1807 it was twenty rising to thirty-two in 1823 and to

forty six in 1841, but in 1862 was reduced to twenty-seven and back again to forty-four in 1872. The original chapel built in 1812 lasted until 1867 when, in May 1868 land was purchased from Mrs. Batchelor of Dagnall for twenty pounds and in 1869 the new chapel was built in Chapel Lane, Northall at a cost of two hundred and thirty-five pounds.

Thomas Hart' ministry ended in 1870 and he was succeeded by Richard Purser from Leighton Buzzard. He saw a number baptised and received into membership also and appears to have led a thriving and active church for nineteen years. In 1890 receipts of thirteen pounds, seventeen shillings and one penny were recorded with "Payed away" eleven pounds, five shillings and three-pence, leaving a balance of two pounds, eleven shillings and tenpence to carry forward. Thomas Cox of Leighton Buzzard served as Pastor from 1890 to 1899 when Jesse Ruffett, who is mentioned previously served until 1912.

Unfortunately it appears that neither Minutes nor accounts or any other record seems to have been kept during this time. The old minute book which was kept was not always easily decipherable and names were often hard to distinguish due to the activities of a zealous but rather ghoulish recorder who marked "Dead" against many names and ruled through others presumably for the same reason that they were deceased!

A second book, much clearer and more decipherable, records that *"On November 5th 1899 Mr. Thomas Cox of Luton presented to the Church an Harmonium in Mahogany case having three stops for its use in conducting the Public Psalmody in Divine Worship which was gratefully accepted by them and brought into use on same date"*. On April 19th 1912 a Church Meeting appointed Mr. George Chapman of Leighton Chairman of the Church Meetings, Mrs. Reeve and Mrs. Ruffett joint Church Secretaries and Mr. Chapman Treasurer.

It is evident from the minutes that the new regime was methodical and organized. Visitors were appointed to report on applicants for church membership and Mr. Bieron was appointed a deacon of the church. At the next meeting Messrs. W.E. Collett, Herbert Janes and H. Dimmock joined Mr. Bieron as deacons. At this same meeting it was resolved that *"an agreement be agreed for the use and maintenance of the pump for the supply of water in the field adjoining the Church for the sum of five shillings per annum"*. A list was also drawn up of members in order of date commencing membership. This comprised fourteen ladies and four men dating from 1855 to 1907. In June 1912 it was requested that Brother David Simons be asked to attend the lighting of the lamps in the church during the coming season.

In August 1912 it was decided that Northall should link up with Hockcliffe Street Baptist Church in Leighton Buzzard and that the pastor of that Church, Rev. Alfred Butler be invited to take the position of Honorary Pastor of Northall Baptist Church also. Evidently this was agreed by Rev. Alfred Butler and Hockcliffe Street and a Recognition Service was held on 14th November 1912.

Other important matters were also discussed: *"Bro. Collett explained that he desired to vary the hanging of the lamp over pulpit slightly and demonstrated the further utility in so doing to which the church assented"*! At this time it was the custom for the church to agree to a list of acceptable preachers, some being put on probation for some six months before being fully accredited.

In the meeting dated June 3rd 1914 it was agreed that the Harvest Thanksgiving Services be held on Sunday October 4th. On November 19th 1914 it was reported that the provisional official valuation of the Chapel for the full site value was ten pounds, and it was noted that *"Owing to the outbreak of War with Germany the appeal against above (if desired) is extended until further notice, no action to be taken"*.

Meetings continued during the First World War, but they lost the services of Rev. Alfred Butler due to his move to a pastorate in Tunbridge Wells. In November 1915 a resolution was passed for the chapel to be *"insured against aircraft"*.

No records exist of the period from November 1916 until the beginning of 1922 and only occasional meetings were then held through to 1934. At a meeting in September 1934 it is recorded that *"there be placed on record a deep sense of the loss sustained by the Church on the passing of the late Secretary of the Church, Mrs. Edmund Reeve of Home Farm, Northall, who as a member of the Church for twenty-five years and Secretary for twenty-two years and who by her devotion and loyalty to the cause and Kingdom of God left behind her a life worthy of emulation"*. In the same meeting her grand-daughter, Miss Kitty Reeve, (Later to be Mrs. Dodwell) took up the Secretarial work and extra work of lighting and attendance to the fires, and on August 12th 1937 *"was heartily thanked by those present for her services so pleasantly and joyfully rendered to the Church"*.

At one meeting later that month it was agreed that electric light and heating should be installed at a cost of fourteen pounds, five shillings although it was also agreed that linking up with the electricity mains should be deferred. At the next meeting, however, it was agreed that Luton Corporation should be asked to supply electric current to the church at the earliest possible moment.

On Thursday November 4th 1937 the Church was reopened after renovation by Mrs. Griffin of Slapton, an address was given by Rev. W.G. Legassick of Leighton Buzzard and solo by Miss Joyce Gray of Edlesborough. Tea was sixpence each and a coffee supper was to be provided at a cost of eightpence each. Sadly, perhaps, this grand event is followed by no further records of any developments for some time.

It seems that no services were held during the 1939-45 Second World War and although services continued at intervals, the next

records bring us to March 14th 1966 when a Church Meeting was chaired by the Baptist Union Area Superintendent, Rev. D. Hicks, supported by Rev. Peter Wilson, the pastor of Hockliffe Street Baptist Church and with fifteen others in attendance set out to regularise the status of the Northall church in relation to the Baptist Union. Although the status of the church under the original Trust Deed was independent, the same deed provided that in the event of regular public worship ceasing to be held at Northall, the premises would revert to the Baptist Building Fund. Some twelve months before on the death of the last surviving member this event appeared to have occurred. It was therefore necessary for the church to be re-constituted with the Baptist Union as trustees. After discussion this was agreed, Mrs. K. Dodwell being appointed Hon. Secretary, Mr. R. Reeve, Treasurer, Miss D. Edwins as Sunday School Leader and Mr. R. F. Broadfoot as the Lay Pastor.

So began the modern history of Northall Baptist Church. Under the leadership of Mr. Broadfoot (picture on page 27), local families worked together to establish an effective centre of witness for the village to the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ. A great deal of effort and funds were expended on modernizing the chapel - always recognizing the principle that the expenses of the church should be met through direct giving of the congregation and members, rather than through other activities, and a gift of forty pounds from West Street Baptist Church in Dunstable went towards the cost of heating the chapel.

Mr. Broadfoot was a schoolmaster who had been in fellowship at West Street Baptist Church in Dunstable. He set out to re-establish a lively church that would cater for all the community in Northall. Efforts had been made to continue a Sunday School in the years up to 1966 under the leadership of Mr. Robert Reeve but in spite of patient perseverance, numbers had been small and for some time it was reduced to a single child. Mr. & Mrs. Broadfoot re-established the Sunday School and willing volunteers were found to teach and encourage children to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

The chapel was restored after a great deal of neglect but heavy repair costs did not inhibit this little fellowship from giving generously towards the needs of others, including victims of the war in Vietnam and oversea missionaries.

A regular pattern of events took shape. Church Anniversary and Sunday School Anniversaries were important occasions, of course, with special contributions from the Sunday School and visiting choirs. Easter, was recognised as of paramount importance in the Christian year and Harvest Thanksgiving Services brought a rich array of enormous vegetables and sweet smelling fruits to transform the musty chapel atmosphere. Christmas was celebrated with carol singing around the village and a special Carol Service held in the chapel to which everyone in the village was invited.

Outings for the children were well attended including a good number of adults. Villagers over eighty years of age were given one hundredweight of coal for Christmas, later commuted to a cash gift of five pounds. Every effort was made to encourage village participation in the life of the Church. However, times were changing rapidly. Many of the wider village community had moved into the modern homes built for commuters and fewer were interested in church activities. Other pastimes claimed the attention both of children and their parents.

In 1979 Pastor Broadfoot died and for three years Northall relied upon lay preachers from surrounding churches to fill their pulpit. Indeed, for many years visiting lay preachers had provided valuable ministry to the little fellowship and continued to do so.

In 1982, however, the decision was made to invite one of the regular preachers to undertake the Lay-Pastorate of the church and on 3rd April 1982 the Service of Induction of Pastor Derek Yirrell was chaired by Rev. N. C. Barr, the pastor of Hockcliffe Street Baptist Church in Leighton Buzzard.

The chapel was packed with friends and well-wishers for this service and the inevitable anti-climax was felt on the following Sunday when the small regular congregation met for their worship service. The chapel said a grateful farewell to Mrs. Broadfoot on her retirement to Whitely Village, but the work with children continued for some time. A monthly Family Service was also established with support from some of the parents and a vision of the world-wide church was developed with about 30% of the small income of the church going to famine relief, a children's hospital in Kenya, an orphanage in Indonesia, work amongst street children in Peru and other missionary ventures as well as children's work in the UK. In July 1986 Pastor Yirrell baptised Messrs. Bob Reeve and Roy Chesterman, the first service of Believer's Baptism in the chapel for nearly one hundred years and in September 1988 Mr. Chesterman's daughter, Ruth, was also baptised. Again the regular pattern of church life went on but the deaths of many of the faithful congregation and the building of a Community Centre on the other side of the village caused the chapel's influence on village life to decline further as in so many other villages throughout the country. The congregation shrank to a handful and all their efforts to reach out into the village seemed unrewarding, although the small bi-monthly "*Messenger*" ensured that some contacts were maintained.

What of the future? Success breeds success and large churches and congregations undoubtedly attract more and more people to their services. Sadly, the converse is also true. The pattern of committed Christians living in villages travelling to the towns for fellowship and avoiding small village chapels is well known. Among the reasons for this phenomenon there is the need of young people for Christian fellowship with others of their own generation. The same is true of young married couples and the inevitable result is that as the younger element is filtered out to the town churches, only the elderly and less mobile element of the community are left in the village chapels. This, in turn, can lead to stagnant village fellowships which lack energy and avoid innova-

tion, becoming less and less attractive to those they need to reach with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It may be said that the quality of ministry and leadership in the village churches is also inferior and even boring, but anyone who has experienced the problems of ministering week by week to a tiny congregation knows the revitalizing effect just one or two visitors can have on the most moribund of preachers! Who knows what surprises await the casual visitor who strays into a village chapel?

Northall Baptist Church began with a rebellion! William Johnson was a man of energy and vision who knew what he believed and consequently built up a vibrant Christian fellowship. Without men and women with such vision and energy the village chapels will die and villages will become unevangelized deserts in our land.

Examples of village churches into which the Spirit of God has breathed new, exciting life do exist. We do not have to accept decline as inevitable, providing we continue to maintain the rebellion against the onset of materialism, greed and immorality. At Northall Baptist Church we seek the restoration of God's sovereignty over our lives through the teaching of the Bible.

Many today, in villages, towns and cities, regard such teaching as out of date and irrelevant to the modern world, and we can see the effect such fashionable ideas have upon communities. What would have seemed unacceptable behaviour to past generations is fashionable both in establishment and 'progressive' circles. The true revolutionaries are to be found in the churches which proclaim that men, women and children can be born again to the assurance of eternal life through the death of Christ on the Cross, that they may form a society in which truth, justice and love is practised through the power of the Spirit of God.

This is no time for village churches to crumble. They are needed as outposts of the Kingdom, as evangelizing centres from which

active, committed believers can reach out to millions in despair and cynical unbelief.

Will Northall Baptist Chapel reach its 200th Anniversary in the year 2002? At present, to human minds, it seems unlikely. But what if the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord of the Church has plans for the work in Northall and other villages to continue? Will God's people be equal to the task? Will there be a vision for an awakening in the countryside as well as in the towns? Looking back, we can see that village work is never easy, that there are many pitfalls and disappointments and only small rewards, but perhaps even now the Lord God is looking for obedience to His call: *"Whom shall I send and who will go for us?"* Will someone respond, *"Here am I, Send me?"*.

Derek G.Yirrell January 1996.

OUR 200th ANNIVERSARY IN VIEW

So much has changed since this little booklet was first published. God has His own way of answering our prayers and aspirations. In April 1998, after much prayer and careful consideration, our tiny congregation approached the leadership of Hockliffe Street asking for help and guidance. As a result, Northall Baptist Church agreed to become a branch church of Hockliffe Street Baptist Church in Leighton Buzzard. Under the kindly and wise guidance of Senior Minister, Rev. Philip Hill first Rev. Brian Trudgian acted as leader of the church until the end of June 1999 and then elder Richard Young took up the challenge. The congregation has increased from a handful to thirty or more and, as the congregation increased, so improvements have been made to facilities in the church.

On 12th July 1999 we celebrated the 64 years of service as Church Secretary of Mrs. Kitty Dodwell who is mentioned earlier in our narrative. More baptisms have also followed, Mrs. Lorraine Johnson and Mrs. Doreen Chesterman being baptised on 2nd July 2000 and Mr. Derrick Bonfield on 8th October 2000. As an outreach to the village a coffee morning has been established each Thursday between 10:30 and 12:30 pm. by Roy and Doreen Chesterman. Recognition of the wider fellowship has also continued and regular support given to missionaries and relief agencies overseas.

Now we approach the 200th Anniversary of the founding of the fellowship. What would William Johnson think of the church today? Doubtless, being the man he was, he would be frank in his comments on some aspects of church life in the second millennium, but this is God's work and, although we give thanks for the faithful ministry of so many of His servants down through the years, our praise and thanksgiving must first be to our God: *the LORD has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes (Psalm 118:23 NIV)*.

D.G.Y. (May 2002)

THE NEXT DECADE: 2002-2012

Pastor Derek Yirrell concluded his main treatise, 'Rebels in Green Pastures' dated January 1996, on a somewhat negative note with the question, "Will the Northall Church reach its 200th anniversary in 2002? At present, to human minds, it seems unlikely, but what if the Lord . . . has plans for the work in Northall".

A mere six years later, knowing his move out of the area was imminent, he wrote the brief Addendum, dated May 2002, which was much more upbeat. He stated, "We now approach the 200th anniversary of the founding of the fellowship".

This event actually took place a few weeks later on the 15/16th June, before Derek and his wife Edna moved to the South coast. Rev Phil Hill, the senior minister of Hockliffe Street Baptist Church, Leighton Buzzard, led the event with Rev Brian Trudgian and Mr Richard Young, and with Rev David Jackman as the guest speaker.

A number of changes were afoot during the coming months. The agreement alluded to in Derek Yirrell's Addendum was not binding, but was to be ratified or discontinued within five years. In October of that year, Rev Phil Hill circulated a letter to all Hockliffe Street Church members who lived south of Leighton Buzzard, inviting them to support the Northall Church, which Mr Richard Young was still leading, whilst retaining their HSBC membership, until such time as they may wish to transfer to Northall, but no later than Easter 2003, the conclusion of the five year period. Some twelve members gradually transferred their allegiance, all of whom were given a very warm welcome by the indigenous Northall members.

For a number of reasons, not least the high cost of the legal process to merge the different trust deeds (with no guarantee of success), it was decided to dissolve the arrangement, and for Northall to resume its independent status.

At that time Mr Richard Young informed the church meeting that his tenure as leader, originally for 2 years but by now extended to 3½ years, had to cease and that he wished to step down from this responsibility at the end of 2002.

The church meeting then asked Mr Steve Orchard if he would consider becoming the new leader from January 2003. Steve and his wife Helen had transferred membership from HSBC to Northall in 2001. After much prayer and deliberation with Helen, Steve accepted the invitation on the condition that it would be a shared husband-and-wife ministry. This was a new concept for the membership to consider, and thankfully they whole-heartedly embraced it. And so began the re-launch of Northall Baptist Church.

An early task was the formulation of the Aim of the Church, the Statement of Faith and the Membership Covenant. A practical requirement was to negotiate with Mr Peter Pratt, the farmer whose land surrounds the chapel, for a parcel of adjacent land for use as a car park; a long-term lease was set up and the area was subsequently doubled in size and gravelled.

Greater involvement than hitherto was established and continues with Village Churches Together. Fellowship with other Christians was enjoyed in the area of study groups, held during Lent and in the Autumn using chapel premises and members' homes, the annual Open Air meeting on Edlesborough Green, hosting combined services and, in 2006, an Alpha course.

Bi-monthly fellowship meals commenced following the Sunday morning service which in summertime have, over the years, variously included alfresco lunches, barbecues at the village hall, picnics, a canal cruise, and the harvest supper in early October as on previous occasions, to which all folk on the periphery of the church were invited.

Existing missionary support was continued and added to, and the year concluded with the Samaritan's Purse shoe-box appeal (for

children in 3rd-world countries) and Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree appeal (for prisoners' children). Sadly, the first year saw the loss of three elderly members, including one that had transferred from HSBC, with a further loss in 2004 of Mrs Dill Bonfield, a life-long Northall resident and church member, and the departure of Roy and Doreen Chesterman to South Wales.

Highlights of 2004 were to increase village awareness by erecting a signpost at the entrance to Chapel Lane, placing **NORTHALL BAPTIST CHURCH** in bold letters on the side wall easily visible from the main road, and the design, planning and refurbishment of the interior of the chapel with dry lining of the walls, a suspended ceiling, side pew removal and replacement with comfortable chairs, new windows and carpeting. These improvements increased the insulation properties of the building and made it more fuel efficient and comfortable for worship.

Northall is a small village with one church and one pub, and in December church and pub came together in a joint venture when The Swan hosted a memorable evening of community carol singing interspersed with several snippets of Christmas-related information, and led by Helen Orchard. Music was provided by Jan Sloggett on keyboard and supplemented by a few members of the local Salvation Army band. The event had been well advertised and there was a tremendous response. Mine host, Graeme Rust and his wife provided copious supplies of sausage rolls and mince pies 'on the house' and were so pleased with the evening we were invited back for a similar event the following year.

During this period a new amplification system was installed along with a hearing aid loop and recording equipment so that members unable to attend could have and enjoy a recording of the services in their own home.

A Summer Celebration was held on June 11/12th 2005 inviting all villagers and those folk with past connections with the chapel to see the refurbished interior which had been com-

pleted the previous November. A dozen current chapel activities and concerns were demonstrated by floral displays and another display featured many aspects of the 203-year history of the church, including 19th and early 20th century census records. In the evening a Praise Celebration was held with favourite hymns, poems, readings and drama. The Sunday morning service was led by Steve with sermon by Helen, and the weekend concluded with Sunday lunch.

A Holiday Club was held during the week of 15th – 19th August in Eaton Bray village hall for five to eleven year old Northall children, and was led by Mrs Catherine Roots, from Trinity Methodist in Leighton Buzzard. The title was 'The Mission Miracle Maker' and incorporated a 'Spaceman' theme with various craft, cooking and games activities and refreshments, all provided by Northall members.

Another joint venture by The Swan Inn and Northall Chapel was a Family Bar-B-Q at the pub in September, to be held in the garden behind the pub. Sadly, this was not as successful as the Christmas event as the Christian duo who had been advertised to provide live music were prevented from coming by illness, the substitute group did not include Christian content, and the weather was wet so we had to move inside.

The church sponsored a Tearcraft stall at the Edlesborough Christmas Fayre in the High Street on Friday evening of December 9th. This was a special event with all proceeds after expenses going to the Disasters Emergency Committee, of which Tearfund is a member, to support those affected by the Indonesian tsunami and the Kashmiri 'quake.

This was followed a week later by another evening of Carol Singing and Christmas readings at The Swan in response to the invitation the previous year, and again was much appreciated.

In March 2006 Northall chapel fielded a team at the annual village quiz and supper evening at the village hall in aid of Age Concern, and won! Support for this has become a regular fixture – although ‘winning’ has not!

However, the main event of 2006 was the 10-week Alpha course. It started on Tuesday 25th April with a Buffet Supper and introductory video, followed by a ten week Tuesday evening course including all day on Saturday 10th June. The evenings were led by Mrs Pippa Pearce, Mark Ellis, Steve and Helen Orchard, with Rev Brian Trudgian taking the Saturday. This proved to be a blessing to many, as it has been throughout the country and further afield. Although primarily evangelistic, an important secondary function was as a course of revision for Christians. It had been widely advertised through the ‘Focus’ magazine circulated to the four villages, and it provided a resource for neighbouring churches and furthered the aims of the local Villages Churches Together.

A Summer Club was held again in August on behalf of Villages Churches Together, this time in Northall village hall, with the same leader assisted by folk from the various churches in the area, and with a ‘Pirates’ theme.

Also in early August we mourned the loss of life-long church member Kitty Dodwell in her 94th year. A native of Northall, but for many years resident in neighbouring Eaton Bray, Kitty had been church secretary for over 64 years!

In 2007, a couple who become regular members of the congregation, could trace their ancestors back to Amos Janes who was a Trustee and Member of the Chapel when, in 1869, it was rebuilt on the current site in Chapel Lane. Another new venture was a Northall Church stall at the Villages’ Carnival held on Edlesborough Green in July, with competitions for children, a photographic competition for adults, and prizes and food for all. In September we had a church evening canal cruise with

fish & chip supper which was enjoyed by both members and friends. In November, further works were carried out on the building including replacing the remaining pews with chairs, re-carpeting the Church, updating the electrics and replacing the Vestry and Kitchen windows. A video projector was provided for use in services and studies. The year concluded with another occasion of carol singing at the Swan.

In 2008 we welcomed the Mpouki couple with a young family, and this led to a restart, after many years, of a Sunday School class. This was led by three lady members and held initially in the vestry. In the summer, external repairs were carried out to the Church; including rebuilding three of the piers to the railings, external decorations, and pointing repairs. A CD recorder and copier were purchased to meet the needs of those unable to attend services.

As in all life, churches experience both blessings and sorrows, and our church secretary, Phil Connacher, sadly passed away in October, having been ill all the year.

It was also during 2008 that Steve and Helen asked the Church to consider the vulnerability of our fellowship as a small independent Church. Investigation and discussion took nearly a year and the final decision on the route to be taken was in 2009. After looking initially at an organisation called Rural Ministries, it was decided that we should seek membership of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB). The B.U. already held the trust deeds of the chapel, and following visits and interviews the church were duly elected members of the Central Baptist Association division of BUGB, whilst remaining an autonomous fellowship. It was considered of great benefit to the church in being part of a wider family, along with its resources and the offer of specialist advice to meet the unending welter of legislation, and this continues to be the case. Our annual donation also contributes to the Baptist Home Mission Fund which provides pastoral aid for small churches without leadership

or who cannot rely on a pulpit supply of lay preachers, as we enjoy at present.

We were saddened to learn in early July that our ex-Pastor Derek Yirrell had suddenly passed away at home, and some from the church attended the thanksgiving service at St Marks Church, Bexhill.

In January 2010 the Northall Church hosted the annual United Service of the four villages Churches Together at which the speaker was the newly-installed Bishop of Bedford, the Rt Rev Richard Neil Inwood.

During February and March a complete upgrade of the single toilet facility was completed, the new design allowing for adjacent conventional and disabled toilets within the old toilet area. Later, ramps from either approach were built by Steve Orchard to provide wheelchair access to the new toilets. The toilets were constructed and fitted out, and the ramp built, in accordance with legislation, in particular that relating to facilities for the disabled in public buildings, with which the Church has to comply. Also baby changing facilities were included in the disabled toilet.

Then in July, having purchased a marquee the previous year, we took a larger plot at the Carnival on Edlesborough Green, at which several contacts were made.

At the Prayer & Planning meeting in November Steve and Helen informed the church that they felt the time was right for them to discontinue their leadership and move out of the district. Steve had taken early retirement during the summer, and they wanted to offer themselves for a decade of Christian work in a different sphere of service. In March 2011 a special church meeting was called to discuss the future leadership, and in April nominations were considered, a ballot was taken and the church appointed a leadership team comprising Melvyn Fenton, John Hazell and Roger Smallridge to share the responsi-

bilities. The transition was to start immediately, to be completed by the end of June, at which time Steve and Helen's ministry would officially discontinue - and so ended a truly remarkable 8½ year joint leadership. Both of them were already working part-time in administrative roles at the UK headquarters of Wycliffe Translators near High Wycombe, so they sold their house at Leighton Buzzard and bought a bungalow in the nearby village of Radnage. A farewell party and thanksgiving service was held over the weekend of 16th/17th July to which past members and friends were invited on the Saturday to a scrumptious tea followed by two speeches of appreciation, then John Hazell presented them with a cheque subscribed by the church. The following Sunday worship was led by John Hazell, the newly-appointed secretary, Melvyn Fenton spoke on the subject of 'moving on', then all three leaders laid hands on Steve and Helen while Roger Smallridge prayed for them in their new ministry.



**Members and Friends at Steve & Helen Orchard's Leaving Tea
(16th July 2012)**

In August 2011, the decision was made to open up the old 'Stable' to use for general storage and free up the existing store room

which was then redecorated for use as a 'Children's Room' so that the Sunday School could be away from the main church area and the children be free to enjoy a wider range of activities including music. The external doors on both the Stable and Toilets were replaced. In September it was at last financially possible to replace the 142 year old main doors to the church (having been in use since the chapel was built in 1869). The old doors were worn out, having been continually repaired over the latter years and held together by 'filler and paint'. The new doors were similar in style but with glazed units in the upper half to enable displays to be set up in the porch and lit for special occasions like Easter, Harvest and Christmas.

The big event at the start of 2012 was the stripping out of the kitchen area to attend to a collapsing floor. As so often is the case, the extent of damage proved to be far worse when exposed, considerably exceeding the estimated price, but it had to be done to meet Health & Safety requirements. None of the existing equipment was reusable, so a complete new kitchen was installed. It also provided the opportunity to insulate the area making it warmer in winter and more fuel efficient as well as complying with current regulations. We are most grateful to Melvyn for masterminding this remedial work and refurbishment, together with the toilet upgrade mentioned earlier, both of which will last for many years to come.

Since then a whole series of minor work has been required, mostly a reflection of the age of the premises. These consisted of roof leaks, woodworm in the out buildings, dry rot in the baptistry, failure and replacement of the electric heaters and the relaying of parts of the pathway around the Church to make perambulation safe.

November 2012



***NORTHALL BAPTIST CHURCH
EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL VIEWS - 2012***



ROBERT BROADFOOT
(PICTURED IN 1966)

PASTOR FROM 1966-1979



NORTHALL BAPTIST CHURCH CRADLE ROLL

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Katherine Stella HAWKINS Born:- 25 June 1964 Dedicated:- 25 April 1965 | Mandy BRANDON Born:- 6 November 1964 Dedicated:- 25 April 1965 | Mark REEVE Born:- 9 December 1967 Dedicated:- 3 March 1968 |
| Peter John WARD Born:- 30 June 1968 Dedicated:- 4 August 1968 | James REEVE Born:- 26 August 1969 Dedicated:- 29 March 1970 | Simon REEVE Born:- 10 August 1971 Dedicated:- 3 October 1971 |
| Clive Graham DANIELS Born:- 28 January 1972 Dedicated:- 11 June 1972 | Lindsay Jane BAKER Born:- 4 December 1979 Dedicated:- 15 June 1980 | Hannah Louse DODWELL Born:- 22 February 1982 Dedicated:- 16 May 1982 |
| Thomas Ian BAKER Born:- 4 May 1987 Dedicated:- 11 October 1987 | Edwin Joseph HOLDEN Born:- 30 May 1990 Dedicated:- 28 April 1991 | Hannah PAYTON Born:- 3 June 1991 Dedicated:- 5 January 1992 |
| Luke FOWLER Born:- Thanksgiving:- 10 Aug 2008 | Amelie MPOUKI Born:- 31 May 2009 Thanksgiving:- 23 Aug 2009 | Elizabeth CHAVGOVA Born:- 7 July 2011 Thanksgiving:- 4 Mar 2012 |

MEMORIES OF THE SUNDAY SCHOOL

Within living memory, during the 1950-60's children from the surrounding area, numbering about 30, would meet on a Sunday afternoon for Sunday School activities. The babies born, for whom thanks was given in this Church, from 1967 until the present day, are listed above.

As time has passed, the Church has attracted a congregation of more mature years. This has concerned some but others have felt that we need to cater both for the under '5s' and the Senior Citizens too.

PASTORS AND PRESIDING ELDERS

The church at Northall has had only one full-time pastor, but has been faithfully served by a succession of presiding elders from its own ranks and from those of other Baptist Churches in the local area. The following list is as near complete as possible. From 1937 to 1966 and between April 1998 and October 2002 the church came under the general care of Hockliffe Street Baptist Church in Leighton Buzzard.

| | |
|-------------|--|
| 1802-1852 | William Johnson of Northall |
| 1855-1859 | David Tearle of Houghton Regis |
| 1860-1870 | Thomas Hart of Leighton Buzzard |
| 1871-1890 | Richard Purser of Leighton Buzzard |
| 1890-1899 | Thomas Cox of Leighton Buzzard |
| 1899-1912 | Jesse Ruffett of Northall |
| * 1912-1915 | Alfred Butler of Leighton Buzzard |
| * 1912-1922 | George Chapman of Leighton Buzzard |
| 1922-1937 | W.E.Collett of Leighton Buzzard |
| 1961-1966 | Joint oversight: John Neilson (Leighton Buzzard) and Douglas Crossman (Dunstable) |
| 1961-1966 | Overseen by Hockliffe Street BC, Leighton Buzzard |
| 1966-1979 | Robert Broadfoot of Dunstable |
| 1981-1998 | Derek Yirrell of Tring |
| 1998-1999 | Brian Trudgian of Leighton Buzzard |
| 1999-2002 | Richard Young of Dunstable |
| 2003-2011 | Steve and Helen Orchard of Leighton Buzzard |
| 2011- | Joint Leadership Appointed: John Hazell; Melvyn Fenton of Leighton Buzzard and Roger Smallridge of Heath and Reach |

* Rev.Alfred Butler of Hockliffe Street Baptist Church acted as Honorary Pastor for the period shown whilst Mr.George Chapman was Chairman of the Church Meetings for the overlapping period.

John Neilson of Hockliffe Street Baptist Church, Leighton Buzzard, and Douglass Crossman of West Street Baptist Church, Dunstable, jointly exercised responsibility for Ministry and arranging Preachers.

Notwithstanding the postal address, Northall is in the county of Buckinghamshire. The chapel is situated off the A4146 road between Leighton Buzzard and Hemel Hempstead . Visitors will receive a warm welcome to the service held each Sunday at 11:00 am. Communion is celebrated as part of the Service on the last Sunday in the month.

Contact Information:

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E-mail: northallchapel@btinternet.com

Mission Statement:

'The aim of this church is to build a strong community of Christian believers, who support and encourage one another in their faith and growth, and proclaim the Gospel by word and deed in their daily lives.'

Acknowledgements.

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Additional copies of this booklet may be obtained from Northall Baptist Church, Chapel Lane, Northall, Dunstable, Beds.LU6 2HF.