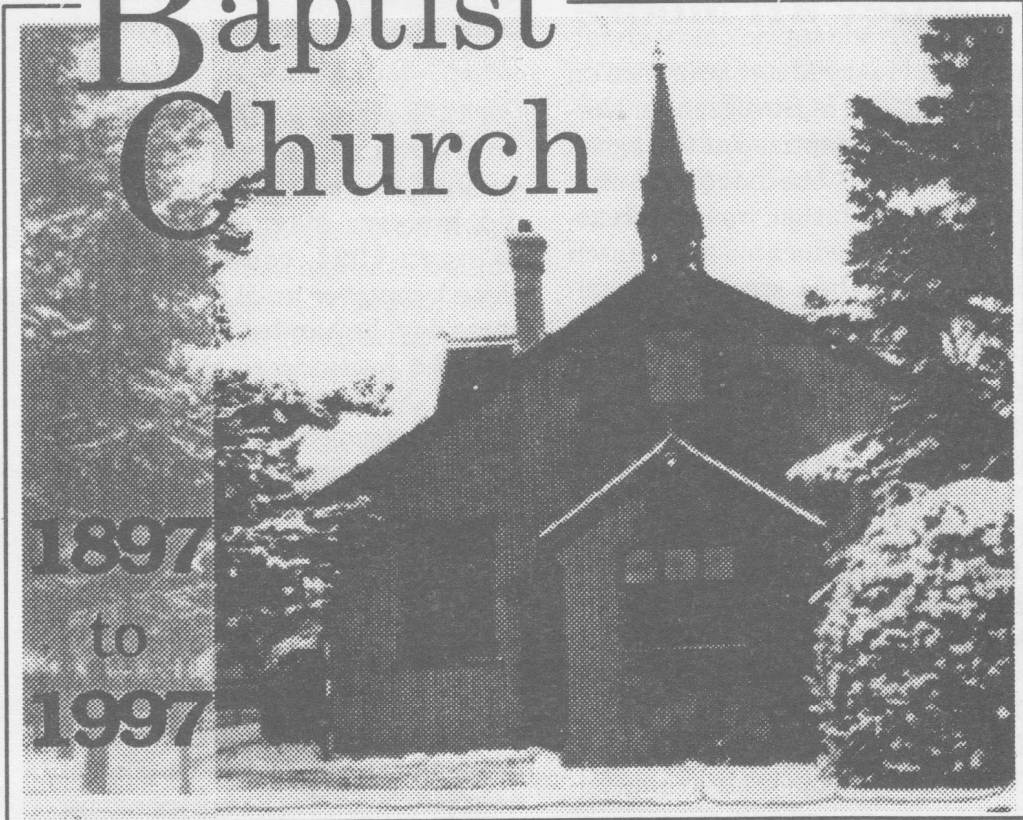


Woodstock Road Baptist Church



The church situated on the corner of Woodstock Road and Beechcroft Road, flanked by the well-known pine trees, is Woodstock Road Baptist Church. It may come as a surprise to know that this church is as old as the main development of Summertown itself.

This short history of the church has been written to commemorate the church's centenary. We hope you find it of interest. If you have not yet been inside the church building, we look forward to seeing you any Sunday (10.30am and 6.30pm), and/or at any of the special centenary events.

The Early Years and the Involvement of the Rev JH Moore

Mr John Henry Moore was born on 4 March 1851, at Swaffham in Norfolk. He was baptized at the age of 14, and joined the Baptist church (of which his father was the treasurer). He was educated at Taunton School, and then started in business. Later, he left it to undertake evangelistic work, and then entered Regent's Park College in Oxford. He then served in three pastorates before coming to Oxford in 1893 (at Chalk Farm, London, from 1880 to 1884; at Langham, from 1884 to 1890; and at Attleborough, Norfolk, from 1890 to 1893). As a man of independent means, he worked in a voluntary capacity for New Road Baptist Church, Oxford, helping them with their village causes. In 1896, he began open-air evangelistic meetings, which were held throughout the summer. These were supported by Mrs Wiblin of Northern House, South Parade. She made a room available for use as a mission. Meetings continued there until Victoria Hall was built (the present schoolroom). On 6 April 1896, Mr Moore bought two plots of land, which form the present church grounds, and Victoria Hall was built. It was named after Queen Victoria's diamond ju-

bilee (in 1897), and opened on 12 September 1897. It cost between £700 and £800. Mr Moore and nine others officially left New Road Baptist Church in 1898. He then became the first pastor of Victoria Hall.

On 12 September 1901 (his fourth anniversary), Mr Moore relinquished charge of the church. He did, however, stay in Oxford until January 1924, continuing as a church member until then. On the same day he handed over the land and the building to the Baptist Union. For the next eight years, students from Regent's Park College took responsibility for the church, under the oversight of New Road.

In 1902, Mr W. H. V. Burch was the pastor, and the church had 35 members. However, over the next few years numbers declined. It was, therefore, felt that, in order to grow, the church needed a permanent pastor, and to be independent.

Unfortunately, Victoria Hall was too small for a congregation large enough to support a pastor. In response to this situation, Mr Moore provided a 60 ft by 30 ft temporary iron building adjoining Victoria Hall, at his own cost. He also promised financial support until the church became viable. However, he had no wish to take any pastoral responsibility, or to interfere in the church.

The Rev. J. McAuslane, therefore, became the pastor. The church now had a membership of 40 (including 21 from New Road). The new building was opened on 22 April 1909, when a memorial stone was laid by Mr. Moore. That was when Woodstock Road Baptist Church officially became a church (separate from New Road).

Mr Moore continued to live at 200 Woodstock Road (Beechwood) until 1924. He then moved to Suffolk, where he died on 10 March 1932. Shortly before his death, he bequeathed the manse to the Baptist Union with the stipulation that it should be used for the accommodation of the minister of Woodstock Road Baptist Church. His obituary stated that he was an independent man with a gracious and generous spirit, and the heart of an evangelist.

Finance

In the early years of the church, it was supported largely by Mr Moore. From 1909 until at least the 1940s, it received aid from the Baptist Union Sustentation Fund. In addition to weekly offerings, funds were raised by such things as an annual garden party, sales of work, rummage sales, concerts, and door-to-door collections. This type of money raising continued until 1958, when it was decided that it was dishonouring to the Lord.

Throughout the past 100 years, the church has known times of financial difficulty. Indeed, in 1921 it was considered relegating it to the position of a "village station church" so that it could apply for funds from various charities! However, from the 1960s onwards, the financial position of the church has become more independent. It is now in a position to support other works.

Buildings

The early history of the church building has already been mentioned. The manse was either bought or built by Mr Moore, and first occupied by Mr McAuslane. Electric lighting was installed in the church in 1920 (at a cost of £30). In 1932, as mentioned earlier, the manse (198 Woodstock Road) was left to the Baptist Union in trust for the church. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, there was much discussion about what to do with the buildings. These included whether the manse should be kept and renovated, or sold and the proceeds put into a fund for future pastors. The building would have been used by the Baptist Union as a hostel. A suggestion was made in 1933 that the church should close and merge with the Congregational church in Summertown. Later, in 1936, the church was looking at sites near the northern bypass for

a new chapel. It was not until 1947 that the decision was made to stay at the present site. It was then that two iron direction plates were purchased (at a cost of £2 10s) for the Banbury Road end of Beechcroft Road.

Further plans for the buildings were suggested between 1945 and 1955. The temporary building was nearing the end of its useful life, and something had to be done! Some of the plans were very grand, involving a chapel with a gallery, a two-storey hall, and a semi-basement. The final decision (for financial reasons) was to build on a kitchen, toilets, and a shed. The existing building was to be cased in 9 inch brickwork instead of corrugated iron. The west end wall was to be rebuilt with a new entrance, the windows were to be replaced, and the building re-roofed with aluminium. This work was carried out at a cost of just over £2500. The building was reopened on 8 October 1955. A false ceiling was erected in the schoolroom in 1958. At that time, the present kitchen was erected, plus an additional toilet. The kitchen was renovated in 1965.

In the 1980s, the interior of the chapel was renovated. The wood was stripped back and lightened, and improved lighting was installed. The platform area was also changed. Carpeting was laid

throughout the chapel, and new chairs were purchased.

Church Government

In 1909, when the church was established, separate from New Road, it was run by the pastor and a committee (which was elected yearly). There was also a ladies committee, which appears to have been responsible for teas and fund-raising. The church belonged, at that time, to the Oxford Association of Baptist Churches. Later, in 1915, the church was limited in what it could do because it was the recipient of a grant from the Baptist Union Sustentation Fund. From the 1920s onwards, the church was increasingly beholden to the Baptist Union Council of Circuits. In the late 1920s, three founding members were made life members of the committee (which by now also included women, although quite separate from the ladies committee). Those three, later became life deacons. In 1928, members of the committee began to be designated as deacons, and were elected by a two-thirds majority and stood for three years. By the 1930s, the ladies committee faded from view, being largely replaced by the Baptist Women's League in 1934. Committees of all sorts were in vogue at that time, e.g. the improved

lighting subcommittee, the catering committee, the women's sewing guild committee, and the sunshine committee!

It was not until the 1960s that the church became less involved in Baptist Union activities. The government of the church became more autonomous, residing with the pastor and deacons, and having monthly church meetings (since then, church meetings have become quarterly). In 1988, the church reviewed its form of government. As a result, there are now more than one elder (at present there are four, who have spiritual oversight of the church—with the deacons having oversight of practical matters).

Missionary Support

From the beginning of the church until the late 1960s, outreach was almost entirely through associations connected with the Baptist Union, such as the Baptist Missionary Society (BMS) (for work overseas), and the Home Work Fund and Forward Movement (for work in the UK). Indeed, from the 1920s onwards, the church had representatives on the BMS council.

In 1967, it was suggested that the church should broaden its awareness of overseas mission. Monthly meetings were begun, and particu-

lar interest was shown in the Unevangelised Fields Mission (UFM). In 1970, the church agreed to support in prayer and financially Gordon Molyneux, who had been a student assistant pastor at the church, and was working for UFM. With regard to the UK, in 1975 it was agreed to support Mr C. Justice in his evangelistic work. Since then, there has been a steady increase in missionary awareness and involvement within the church. Several individuals and families have been supported as missionaries by the church. A number work with Wycliffe Bible Translators, both translating the Scriptures and in support work, in various parts of the world. The church also supports a family working with the Overseas Missionary Fellowship in Japan, and has sent Helen Stiles to work in a church-planting situation in France.

Links with other Churches and Organisations

For the first 50 years, the church had strong links with New Road Baptist Church, and for the first two decades they often exercised oversight of the church. In addition, for many years, the church was part of the Oxfordshire and East Gloucestershire Association of Bap-

tist Churches. The church left in 1968, when the church leadership expressed concern about the view of Scripture held by the association.

At various times, the church has considered combining with other churches: with St John's Free Church, Squithey Lane, in June 1933; with the Congregational church in Summertown, in December 1933; and with Wolvercote Baptist Church, in 1951.

Since the 1960s, the church has sought to distance itself from churches that hold unscriptural views. It has, however, enjoyed fellowship with other evangelical churches, particularly through IVEC, ODEA (the Oxford and District Evangelical Association), and Evangelicals in Oxford. Links with other Christian groups have also been formed. Initially, these were with various Baptist Union societies. More recently, they have been with organizations like the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, the Oxford Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, the Evangelical Alliance, and the Oxford Ministry to Overseas Students.

Sunday School and Youth Work

Since 1896, there has been a children's/youth work attached to the church. This has consisted of Sun-

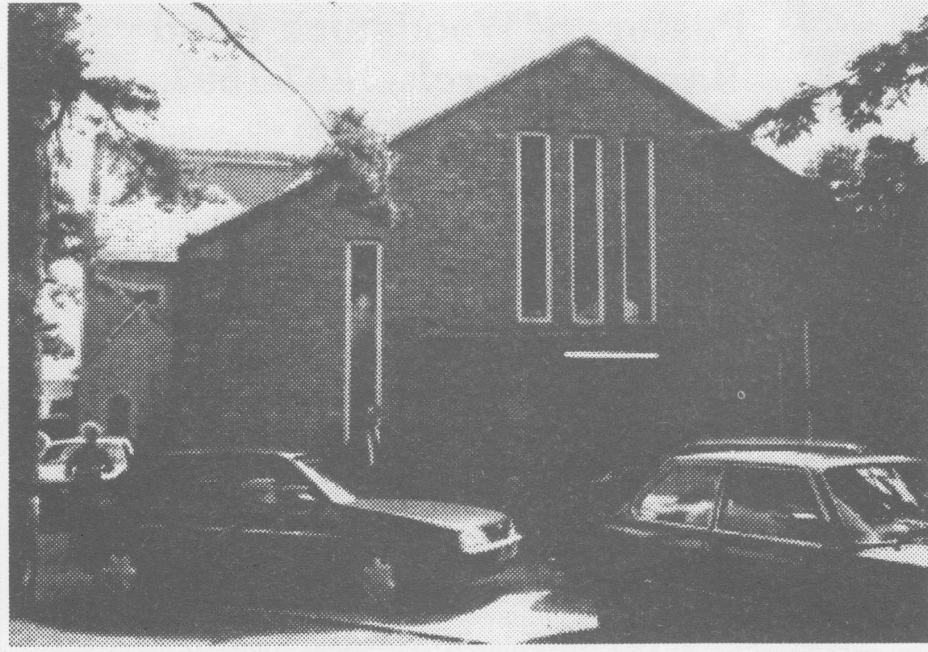
day School (throughout the entire hundred years) and various evening clubs (Junior Fellowship, Young People's Fellowship, Followers, Junior Age Group, and Teenage Group). As part of the Sunday School work, children have been brought in from estates such as Jordan Hill, for which a coach was hired each Sunday in 1958, with the church paying 1s, and the children each contributing 4d bus fare. This was later extended to the children on the Cutteslowe estate. For a while, the church had a minibus which was used for the Sunday School. In recent days, it has proved difficult to recruit children from families outside the church (for both Sunday School and evening clubs). The church first considered working with preschool children in 1970. That was in the form of a playgroup. That never materialized, but in 1979 the idea of a mother and toddler group was suggested. Stepping Stones has now been running on Thursday mornings for 18 years.

Miscellaneous

Other activities that have taken place in the church buildings have included its use by Emmanuel Christian School when it first started, and visits from the Blood Transfusion Service.

Pastors of Woodstock Road Baptist Church, 1897-1997.

1897-1901	Rev. J. H. Moore
1902	Rev. W. H. V. Burch
1903-?	Baptist Union intervened and supplied student pastors
March 1909-October 1914	Rev. J. McAuslane
January 1916-July 1919	Rev. Charles Hobbs
January 1920-May 1921	Rev. Frank Smith
January 1923-October 1931	Rev. Morley B. Simmons
Easter 1933-September 1933	Baptist Union students (various)
September 1933-December 1933	Baptist Union students (Mr Bottom)
February 1934-September 1934	Baptist Union students (Mr G. Miller)
September 1934-October 1938	Rev. Herbert
March 1939-October 1945	Rev. Ashley (but overseas as RAF chaplain January 1942-October 1945: Mr Payne as moderator; April 1942-October 1942, Mr Madge; August 1943-July 1945, Mr Russell)
November 1945-December 1951	Rev. Cooper
August 1952-July 1956	Rev. G. E. Bowden
November 1957-November 1963	Rev. Alec Judd
April 1965-October 1976	Rev. H. George Ely
March 1977-	Dr. Keith R. Stokes



1897-1997

With 100 years of testimony to God's faithfulness behind us, we as a church face the future with utter confidence in our unchanging God, the sufficiency of His Son, and the truth of His Word and its relevance for today. We believe that God has given us much to do in this historic, famous, important and yet very needy city of Oxford.