

# Baptists in Basingstoke: c1867-1939

## Introduction

There were no Baptist causes in Basingstoke recorded in the religious census of 1851. Sixty years later there were two - a Strict Baptist dating from about 1867 and an Open Baptist from 1908. For material about both causes a heavy reliance has been placed upon local newspapers, in particular the *Hants and Berks Gazette*. Virtually no records relating to either cause have been lodged with the Hampshire Record Office.

## Strict Baptists

According to an entry from the Hantsphere website a Baptist Chapel was built in Basingstoke in 1867.<sup>1</sup> While a report in the *Reading Mercury*, indicates that the chapel was formally opened in early February 1868:

OPENING A NEW CHAPEL, - On Sunday last, February 2nd, special services were held in connection with the opening of a new chapel, called Ebenezer Baptist Chapel, for that section known as Particular Baptists. The chapel consists of an entirely new building, of a very neat and plain appearance, and is situated in Church-street. A prayer-meeting was held at seven-o'clock in the morning, which was well attended, and at the fore-noon service, a sermon suitable to the occasion was preached by Mr F. Marshall of London, from 1. Chron. 29th chap. and part of the 20th verse. In the afternoon the members partook of the Lord's Supper, and in the evening Mr Marshall again conducted the service and preached the sermon. The chapel was filled on both occasions.<sup>2</sup>

The Chapel's trust deed was dated 31 December 1868. This was between Charles Hewitt, Thomas Burberry, William Milsom and Samuel White, representing the Baptist members, and William Bray.<sup>3</sup> The chapel is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1871/3 (see Fig.1). It could accommodate 120 worshippers.

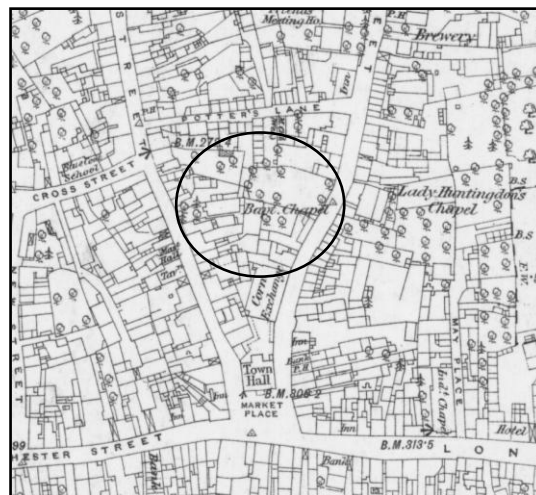


Fig 1: Location of Basingstoke's First Baptist Church as shown on the Ordnance Survey Map of 1871/73.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.hantsphere.org.uk/object-4868-2010> (accessed 19 November 2018).

<sup>2</sup> *Reading Mercury*, 8 February 1868.

<sup>3</sup> Hampshire Record Office Ref: 63M83/81/519. Of the initial trustees the most notable was Thomas Burberry, the founder of what was to become an internationally acclaimed fashion business.

It was subsequently listed in the 1875 and later nineteenth and early twentieth century trade directories.

It is assumed that it was the signatories of the deed who were instrumental in establishing this Baptist cause in Basingstoke. The Chapel was variously labelled, over the years, as Ebenezer, Strict and Particular. This meant that only members could participate in the Lord's Supper (as Holy Communion was known). On the day of the 1882 census 90 worshippers were recorded at the morning service and 65 at the evening.<sup>4</sup> In 1903 the equivalent figures were 55 (including 5 children) and 60 (including 5 children).<sup>5</sup>

There are relatively few references to the Chapel in local newspapers. Services were not advertised and activities were not usually reported. There are, however, a number of exceptions to this absence of publicity. For example, during the early 1890s there are short reports on special events connected with the Sunday school, such as the annual New Year's treat<sup>6</sup> and the summer festival/outing.<sup>7</sup> While in 1895, there was coverage of the differences of view concerning the installation of an organ. As a follow up to a meeting held to discuss the matter, the position was summarised as follows:

... there exists an opinion among the Baptist denomination that the use of an instrument of music is neither necessary nor desirable in a place of worship, and though one has been used during two or three separate periods in years gone by at the chapel in Church-street, it has each time been discarded owing to dissent and disapproval. But at this church for years opinions have differed, opinions have changed, and at length circumstances have forced many to change their opinion, modify their tone, and alter their course of action...

This had prompted the current project which involved raising funds for the purchase of an American organ.<sup>8</sup>

In 1900, reference was made to 'the marriage of Miss M.L. Basten and Mr H.E. Prince ... the first to be solemnised at the Particular Baptist Chapel.'<sup>9</sup> A final example is an account from January 1907 of the third annual gathering of the members and friends of the Young People's Bible Class. At the evening meeting:

Stirring addresses were given by Pastors Gossling, of Hartley Row, and Parker, of Farnham, exhorting their hearers to stand firm to the grand old truths of the gospel as contained in the Word of God handed down to us, for the love of which the noble army of martyrs counted not their lives dear to them.<sup>10</sup>

Directory entries indicate that the Chapel survived as a place of worship until the 1930s, with an Order of the Charity Commissioners indicating that the building was sold in 1936.<sup>11</sup> What happened to any surviving members of the congregation is not known.

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<sup>4</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 18 February 1882.

<sup>5</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 21 March 1903.

<sup>6</sup> This involved games, an address, recitations, solos, duets and 'the distribution of buns, oranges, sweets, &c., kindly provided by members of the congregation.' *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 January 1892.

<sup>7</sup> In 1893 the outing was to Hook Common. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 August 1893. A year later they went in the direction of Greywell and visited the ruins of King John's Castle. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 11 August 1894.

<sup>8</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 and 13 July 1895.

<sup>9</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 21 July 1900.

<sup>10</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 2 February 1907.

<sup>11</sup> The land and hall was sold for £750, with the conveyance being dated 20 February 1937. Ref: HRO 63M83/B1/519.

The hall was initially purchased by the Basingstoke branch of the Post-War Brotherhood which had been established in 1933. Renamed the Brotherhood Hall, and following alterations and renovation undertaken by members on a voluntary basis, it was officially opened in April 1937.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequently, the building was renamed again. It is not known exactly when, but at some point probably in 1940s/50s it became known as “Moose Hall” and became ‘one of the local halls for meetings, dances, wedding receptions and other activities’ (see Fig 2).<sup>13</sup> At the time of the town centre redevelopment it was hoped that it could be retained but this was not to be and it was pulled down in July 1979. This was a sad fate for an important local facility and one with an interesting and varied history.



Fig 2: Moose Hall previously Ebenezer Baptist Chapel

### Open Baptists

Towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century a second Baptist cause was established in Basingstoke. Initial steps were taken in 1906 when what was described as a ‘conference of open Baptists’ was held at the Old Angel Café.<sup>14</sup> At this meeting, which was called to consider ‘the advisability of starting a Baptist cause in ... [the] town’, it was pointed out that:

The strict Baptists have been represented here for a great many years, their place of worship, being in Church Street. Open Baptists who come to the town, if they cannot see their way to associate with stricter brethren, join other Nonconformist denominations, of which there are ten or a dozen existing in the town.

While the number of Nonconformist denominations in Basingstoke at this time might have been slightly exaggerated, it was clear that the meeting had to decide whether it was appropriate to add ‘one more to their number.’ The questions considered were:

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<sup>12</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 April 1937.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.hantsphere.org.uk/object-4868-2010> (accessed 19 November 2018).

<sup>14</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 15 September 1906. The key figures in this initiative were Mr Frankland and Mr John Narris, who chaired the meeting.

What support may we reasonably anticipate?  
 What are we prepared to do?  
 What shall we ask the Baptist Association to do?  
 Shall we suggest a minister or mission for say three months?  
 Shall we try and get a building new or adapted?  
 Could we approach Sherfield and suggest a union with them on the basis of two  
 Sundays here and one at Sherfield?

The outcome of the meeting was a decision to hold a 14 day mission in November to gauge the level of support for an Open Baptist cause in Basingstoke.

It would appear that, although this initiative did not succeed, it prepared the ground since two years later in 1908, thanks to the efforts of the Revd Alfred Bird, an evangelist from Whitchurch, an Open Baptist Church was established. In its summary for the year 1908 the *Hants and Berks Gazette* recorded how it all started:

At Basingstoke the Baptist denomination began holding a series of services in the Town Hall in January. Several eminent ministers of that denomination took part, among them being the Rev. Archibald Brown, of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, the Rev. J.H. Shakespeare, Secretary of the Baptist Union, the Rev. A. McCaig, Principal of Spurgeon's College, and the Rev. S. Vincent, ex-President of the Baptist Union. The services were so well supported that the prime movers of the cause decided to take steps to establish a permanent Baptist Church in the Town.

To this end, for its premises the cause acquired the old British School buildings on Sarum Hill (see Fig 3). As reported, 'the adaptation of the old British School ... [was] expected to be completed in three weeks and the Baptists will then have a commodious but plain building for the purposes of worship which will be sufficient for their needs probably for some years to come.' The purchase price of the premises was £550 and it was anticipated that the cost of the alterations would bring the total sum up to £900. 'Of this sum about £70 or £80 ... [had] been raised and the remainder ... [was to be] found by way of loans free of interest.'<sup>15</sup> It had 200 sittings.

The Church was officially opened on 8 June 1908, Whit-Monday, when a 'ceremony of laying the memorial stones' was held.<sup>16</sup> Various ministers attended, including 'the Rev. R.G. Hern of Portsmouth, Vice-President of the Southern Baptist Association and the Rev. G. Whitfield Brooker of Andover', as well as a large number of lay people associated with the cause. Six stones were laid by church members and others, including the Revd Bird, and these were described as being 'conspicuous in front of the building.'

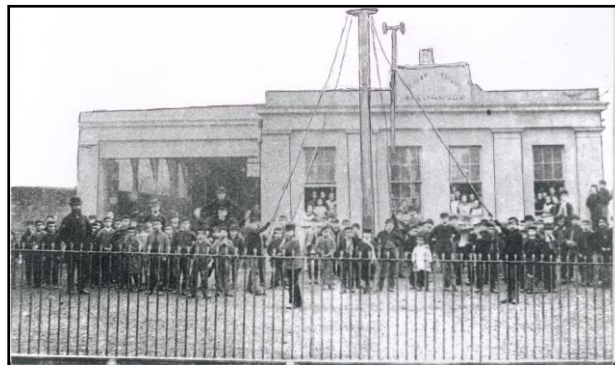


Fig 3: Old British School Buildings on Sarum Hill

<sup>15</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 June 1908.

<sup>16</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 June 1908.

In addition to acquiring premises a number of the institutional markers of church life were quickly established. In October 1908 a mid-week un-denominational service and meeting, known as the sisterhood, was started for women.<sup>17</sup> This appears to have evolved fairly speedily into a Pleasant Monday Evening Society for women with a children's meeting being held on Wednesday afternoons. It is assumed that a Sunday school had also been started, since there is a reference to the scholars going on an outing to Hook in July 1909, with between 50 and 60 availing themselves of the trip.<sup>18</sup>

It was indicative of the Southern Baptist Association's commitment to the Basingstoke cause that very early in the Church's history, in March 1909, the Northern District held its annual meetings in the town. This was described in the press report as 'a signal honour' and the result of the 'progressive character' of Church members. The 'very helpful and inspiring meetings' brought to Basingstoke 'a very distinguished Baptist minister in the person of the Rev. Principal Henderson, head of Bristol College, and ex-President of the Baptist Union.' About 65 partook of the luncheon 'the delegates being joined by local friends, and the presence of the ministers and some members of other Free Churches in the town was an indication of their goodwill towards the newly established Baptist cause.' In the various addresses one theme was that of the financial support of newer churches by older, well established and wealthy ones. In the words of Principal Henderson:

It was not easy to get people to afford financial help to others ... There were two great things they wanted to set before themselves in order to promote the greatest things of all. They wanted to share the money God had given, and they wanted to share the ministries God had given.

As far as the local Church was concerned, the Revd A.J. Edwards of Salisbury commented that: 'The Baptist church [in Basingstoke] was not quite prepared at present to run alone, and if it was to have a successful career it must be as the Southern Baptist Association, for a time at least, afforded it some financial assistance.'<sup>19</sup>

In July 1909 the Church celebrated its first anniversary. It was something of a coup that it was able to secure the services of a well known preacher, the Revd Charles Brown. As it was put in the *Hants and Berks Gazette*:

It is not every day that the dwellers in a provincial town have the opportunity of hearing one of the foremost pulpit orators of the day ... Mr Brown is before everything a preacher, and all the resources of wide culture and native genius, all the charm of a most winning personality, and all the graces of a fine elocution are pressed into the service of preaching the Evangel ... the opportunity of hearing this eminent minister and famous preacher should not be missed.<sup>20</sup>

In the event Brown did not disappoint, preaching on the theme of 'the guest chamber of the Lord' and giving a 'delightful address' that was full of 'wise counsel, kindly humour, and cheery optimism'.<sup>21</sup>

During the first two years of the church's existence, pastoral oversight was exercised by the Revd Bird. On important occasions when he could not attend for personal reasons, as at the first anniversary celebrations, his place was taken by the Revd Joseph Hasler of Southampton, the Secretary of the Southern Baptist Association. Eventually, in early 1910, the Church

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<sup>17</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 October 1908. There were 54 at the first meeting.

<sup>18</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 31 July 1908.

<sup>19</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 20 March 1909.

<sup>20</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 3 July 1909.

<sup>21</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 10 July 1909.

acquired its first permanent minister, the Revd Frederick George West, who came highly recommended by one the leading Baptist ministers of the period, the Revd Frederick G. Meyer.

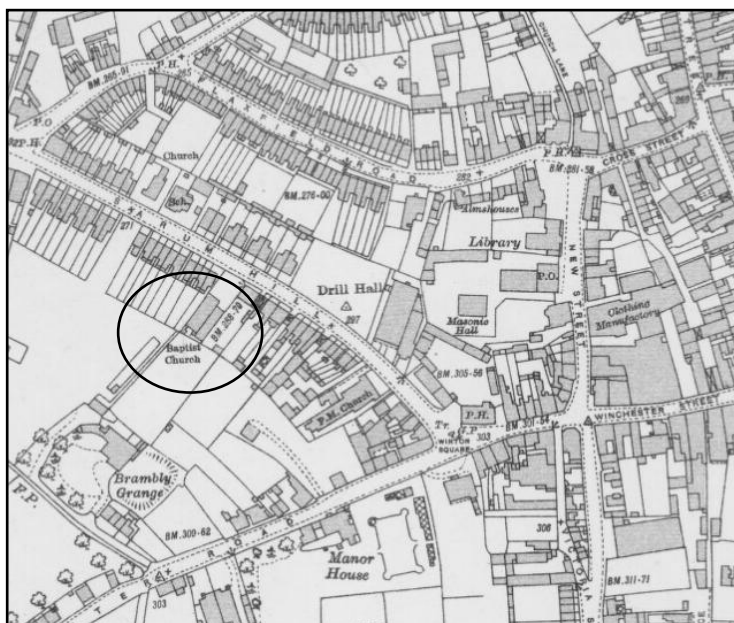


Fig 4: Location of Basingstoke's Sarum Hill Baptist Church as shown on the Ordnance Survey Map of 1930/32.

At West's recognition meeting, Hasler spoke of the 'long cherished desire of many in this part of the county' to have a Baptist Church in Basingstoke and the difficulties which might have 'daunted others' that the Revd Bird overcame. There was also a strong emphasis on collaboration with other Free Churches in Basingstoke. This was demonstrated by the fact that there were contributions from the ministers of the Wesleyan Methodist, Congregational and Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion (Immanuel) Churches. However, there does not appear to have been a representative from the Ebenezer Baptist Church. In the course of his comments, the Revd Reginald Thompson, the Congregational Minister, observed that:

He believed that Basingstoke was a godly town on the whole; a town with an abundance of very kindly folk; a town where any minister might feel that he had a high calling, and that there was material for him to work upon and to work with that would call for the very best of his consecrated and humble endeavour. While he said this he believed there was a large section in Basingstoke that yet remained to be reached; that under God's providence must be and would be reached ...<sup>22</sup>

To what extent the Baptist Church was able to reach the 'un-churched' is not known, but it was to prove a significant addition to the ecclesiastical landscape of twentieth century Basingstoke. Apart from the differences with other denominations over the issue of believers versus infant baptism, the Church was very similar in theological terms to most of the other Free Churches in the town.

In certain respects, the Revd West proved to be a controversial character. During the summer of 1910 he launched a series of open air services in Market Square and, in so doing, clashed with a number of Socialists who were already holding their own meeting in the same location on Sunday evenings. As it was put in a letter to the *Hants and Berks Gazette*: 'it is only fair

<sup>22</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 March 1910.

that the first speakers (in this case the Socialists) should have uninterrupted possession provided they conducted themselves in a proper manner.<sup>23</sup>

It is also worthy of note that the Church's second anniversary services, in July 1910, were conducted 'by the Rev. T.L. Johnson, a coloured minister who was born a slave in Virginia and who lived in slavery for twenty-eight years.' How this was viewed by members is not known, but it would certainly have generated some discussion.

At the anniversary meeting on Monday evening, the Secretary presented some statistical data which provide an indication of the scale and scope of the Church's activities at this time:

... at the last anniversary the number of members on the church roll was 35; now there were 45. A women's meeting held every Monday night had a membership of close upon 100 and a children's meeting on a Wednesday afternoon had a membership of about 90. They had also a meeting for men and a Christian Endeavour Society.

He ended by stating that: 'They looked forward to the next twelve months with abundant hope.'<sup>24</sup>

Notable events during the second half of 1910 were the Church's registration for marriages;<sup>25</sup> a children's concert;<sup>26</sup> and a distribution of books in connection with the Pleasant Monday Evening Society and Wednesday afternoon meetings for children. With respect to the last of these, West:

... said that the Monday evening meetings had been distinctly religious. Mrs West ... had set before them Bible truths. The solos had been sacred at each meeting. The meetings had also been a means of fellowship, the women had an opportunity of helping and encouraging each other, and their presence that evening had shown that the book fund had been a great help. The members had chosen their own books and it was pleasing to notice that 18 Bibles and also a number of Bible stories had been chosen.<sup>27</sup>

In January 1911, through the good offices of West, 'Basingstoke was honoured with a visit from ... the Rev F.B. Meyer ... one of the most renowned and best-loved of the Free Church apostles'. Although a Baptist, Meyer was ecumenically minded and at the time of his visit he was Secretary of the National Free Church Council. Most of the Free Church ministers and the mayor were present to hear him speak with 'the three main points of his discourse being (1) a concurrence of the inward choice with God's providence; (2) a perpetual dialogue with God; and (3) friendly co-operation with Him.'<sup>28</sup>

Another, possibly contentious, aspect of West's ministry was that he and his wife were committed to the cause of women's suffrage and there are reports of him attending and speaking at campaign meetings in Basingstoke. For example, in March 1911, at a meeting chaired by West, he:

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<sup>23</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette* 28 May 1910.

<sup>24</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette* 16 July 1910.

<sup>25</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette* 20 August 1910.

<sup>26</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette* 1 October 1910.

<sup>27</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette* 5 November 1910. Others had chosen works by Bunyan, Tennyson, Longfellow, Dickens etc.

<sup>28</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 14 January 1911.

... controverted the statement made by anti-suffragists that women could take no part in matters relating to the finance, the commerce or the defence of the country, and maintained that in each of these departments women were taking their honourable share. He pointed out that the Free Churches were not afraid of allowing women to vote and take part in the management of church affairs, and they ought not to let them be afraid to take part in political matters on the same terms as men.

The other two speakers were Miss Nina Boyle of the Johannesburg Women's Suffrage Society and Mrs Cooper, 'a Lancashire working woman.' At the end of the meeting the following resolution was passed:

"That this meeting greatly regrets that the Conciliation Bill for granting the suffrage to women householders was not passed in the last Parliament, and wishes to express its earnest desire that a similar Bill might be brought in the present session of Parliament, and that it may become law."

There were no dissentients.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, West did not see any incompatibility between his role as a Christian minister and 'nailing his colours to a very sensitive political mast.' It is not known, what his congregation thought of his stance on the issue of women's suffrage.

West's pastorate turned out to be a relatively short one and he left in the early part of 1912. Consequently, he was no longer there when the Church celebrated its fourth anniversary in July of that year. What prompted his early departure is not known, but as mentioned below, one factor may have been the financial position of the fledgling Church. At the anniversary:

The Rev. A. Bird preached special sermons on the Sunday, and the Rev. J.E. Ennals ... of Salisbury preached an eloquent sermon on Thursday afternoon. This was followed by a largely-attended social tea, and a hearty and numerous-attended evening meeting. Mr J.R. Smith J.P. (of Southampton), proved an admirable chairman, his jocular and witty remarks and his encouraging optimism inspiring the workers for progressive efforts in the future.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, it would seem that the Church was not downhearted following the loss of its minister.

During the interregnum, oversight of the Sarum Hill Church reverted to the Revd Alfred Bird, with support from the previously mentioned Revd J. Hasler. At a sale of work in October 1912 Bird, 'stated that there was still a debt of about £600 on the Church property, and that was a serious handicap not only on their work but also in relation to the settlement of a minister.' Hence there is a possibility that West's departure may have been due to a dispute over his stipend. At the sale, apart from the stalls, 'during the afternoon and evening some half-hour concerts were given by what was boldly stated on the bills to be "the best musical talent in the town."'<sup>31</sup>

Financial challenges notwithstanding, in early 1913 the Church was fortunate in securing the services, for a short while, of the Revd Edwin Alfred Carter. His credentials were impeccable. He was President of the Pioneer Mission and of the Russian Evangelisation Society and had 'been the means of founding and also building up of Baptist Churches in many parts of the homeland.'<sup>32</sup> Not surprisingly, he was in great demand. As it was put at the social event held

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<sup>29</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette* 11 March 1911.

<sup>30</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette* 20 July 1912.

<sup>31</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette* 24 October 1912.

<sup>32</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 February 1913.



to welcome Carter and his wife, he had 'taken up ... residence in the town in order to take charge of the work for some months'.<sup>33</sup>

In the event, Carter remained for less than a year. During the time he spent in Basingstoke the Church celebrated its fifth anniversary. At the evening meeting the Church Secretary referred 'in the highest terms to the excellent work done for the Baptist Church in Basingstoke by the Rev. E.A. and Mrs Carter.'<sup>34</sup> Later in the year it was pointed out that because Carter was 'widely known throughout the denomination, and ... [was] in touch with a great number of the ministers and the laity ... [it was] comparatively ... easy for him to ... [secure the services] of a pastor who would be an acceptable preacher and worker to suit the necessities of so young and difficult a cause as this.'<sup>35</sup>

The pastor in question was Revd Ernest J. Garnham currently serving in Loughborough, where he was 'held in high esteem'. He was described as having 'excellent credentials'<sup>36</sup> and began his ministry in early October. Significantly, Carter was present at Garnham's recognition service held in February 1914, along with the Revds Hasler and Bird. In his remarks, Carter expressed pleasure at renewing his acquaintance and that of his wife 'with friends at Basingstoke whom they had learned to love, and commending his successor to the cordial sympathy of the congregation.'<sup>37</sup>

In August of that year the Church acquired a new organ, with a special musical service being held to mark its installation. In a further demonstration of Free Church fraternisation, the organist of Immanuel Church 'gave an admirable demonstration of its powers.'<sup>38</sup>

Fortunately for the cause, Garnham remained in post until the summer of 1919, with much of his pastorate being dominated by the First World War. A particularly memorable event was the visit in February 1915 by the ex-President of the Baptist Union, the Revd Dr Ewing. Preaching on a Wednesday afternoon from Psalm 37 v.4 on "Delight in the Divine", in the evening he lectured on "The Story of Oliver Cromwell". His visit was 'greatly appreciated and as the *Hants and Berks Gazette* pointed out 'the presence of a large company of soldiers made the occasion very interesting.' The following day troops were also much in evidence when 'in connection with the soldiers' recreation room, a concert was given to a crowded audience.'<sup>39</sup>

In 1916 at the annual thanksgiving services, Garnham 'preached special sermons, morning and evening. While in another display of Free Church solidarity on Monday afternoon, the Revd Roccliffe Mackintosh, the Congregational minister, 'preached a most helpful sermon' and at the evening meeting, the Revd Finlay Mackenzie, the Wesleyan minister, took part in the proceedings. The principal contribution was a lecture by the Revd John Wilson of Woolwich on "D. L. Moody on Modern Evangelism".<sup>40</sup>

Another notable event was the commemoration in 1917 of the third anniversary of Garnham's recognition, when the preacher at an afternoon service was the Revd S. Pearce Carey of Portsmouth, 'the great-grandson of the celebrated missionary to India.' At an evening

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<sup>33</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 March 1913.

<sup>34</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 19 July 1913.

<sup>35</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 September 1913.

<sup>36</sup> These included being President of Loughborough Free Church Council and Secretary of the Minister's Fraternal, as well as being in great demand by churches as a preacher for special services and anniversaries. *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 September 1913.

<sup>37</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 21 February 1914.

<sup>38</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 29 August 1914.

<sup>39</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 February 1915.

<sup>40</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 1 April 1916.

meeting, he 'gave a thrilling lecture descriptive of a tour through India, which he [had] made some years ago when pastor of a church in Melbourne, his eldest brother, the Rev William Carey of Calcutta, acting as guide.'<sup>41</sup>

Garnham left Basingstoke in 1919. His farewell services were 'well attended' and after the evening service a cantata "Saviour of Men" was performed with the church being 'packed to its utmost capacity.' 'Taking with him the good wishes of all who knew him', Garnham moved from Basingstoke to the Baptist Church in Barton Fabis, Leicestershire.<sup>42</sup>

Garnham's successor was the Revd Matthew Flint. He had studied for the ministry at Pastors' College and had recently been released from the army.<sup>43</sup> Fortunately for the Church, he began his ministry in the town immediately following Garnham's departure. During Flint's pastorate, in 1920, the Church re-established a Christian Endeavour society, which was destined to make a valuable contribution to its ministry throughout the inter-War years.

The high regard in which Flint was held was evidenced by an illuminated address presented to him in September 1923 on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of his appointment as pastor. It read:

The Church and Diaconate desire your acceptance of this memento as a token of their deep appreciation of your faithful ministry and increasing activity in the work of the Lord amongst us.<sup>44</sup>

Flint's pastorate came to an end at some point in late 1924 or early 1925, when he moved to Yiewsley Baptist Tabernacle in Middlesex.<sup>45</sup> There is no record of a farewell event but the Church seems to have been in good heart since in welcoming Flint's successor, the Revd Sydney Herbert Wing, the chairman, Mr Potter 'spoke of the unity and the happy conditions which prevailed in every part of the Church.'<sup>46</sup>

Wing moved to Basingstoke from Gosport and on being welcomed he indicated that 'he was looking forward to a happy and useful pastorate.'<sup>47</sup> In his contribution to the first anniversary meeting of Wing's settlement, the chairman, Mr. H. Cater, 'congratulated the minister on the work that was being done at Sarum Hill and on the excellent condition of the Church, and especially remarked on the large number of young people present.'<sup>48</sup> A year later reference was made to 'the splendid spirit of unity which existed in the church ... and the other work which ... [he] had done during the past year.'<sup>49</sup> At the celebrations to mark the third anniversary of his settlement, it was reported that during the previous year congregations, collections and membership had increased, with 15 being added to the church roll.<sup>50</sup> A year later, reflecting the continued good relations which existed between the Baptist and other Nonconformists churches in Basingstoke, 'the excellent birthday tea ... was provided in the Primitive Methodist schoolroom by kind permission of the minister and trustees of that

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<sup>41</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 31 March 1917. 'The audience was alternatively saddened and uplifted, as Mr Carey himself had been ... saddened ... by ... so much physical misery and yet more by the darkness which beclouds the intellectual life of a people still for the most part enchained in heathendom; encouraged ... by the hope of deliverance from their idolatry which has dawned after years of patient Christian missionary effort.'

<sup>42</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 July 1919.

<sup>43</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 July 1919.

<sup>44</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 6 October 1923.

<sup>45</sup> *Uxbridge and West Drayton Gazette*, 6 February 1925.

<sup>46</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 October 1925.

<sup>47</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 October 1925.

<sup>48</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 20 November 1926.

<sup>49</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 29 October 1927.

<sup>50</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 24 November 1928.

church.’ Moreover, the ministers of other churches either attended in person or sent their apologies. At the evening meeting, there was a ‘splendid attendance ... and the choir was in full force’. Church members were encouraged by speeches given by Mr H. Ansell, the President of the Southern Baptist Association, and the visiting preacher, the Revd C.W. Screetch. The latter ‘spoke very helpfully and humorously, and said many things to stimulate a spirit of hopeful optimism.’<sup>51</sup>

It is clear from earlier comments that Wing was ecumenically minded. This was also evident in him serving as President of the Basingstoke Christian Endeavour Union during 1927/28.



Fig 5: Sarum Hill Baptist Church during the inter-War Years

In addition to his ministerial role, Wing was elected to the borough council at a by-election in November 1926, as a nominee of the Labour Party,<sup>52</sup> and stood for re-election in November 1927.<sup>53</sup> He appears to have been a conscientious councillor with an excellent attendance record and served as chairman of the Library and Museum Committee. He did not seek re-election in November 1930, having ceased his ministry at Sarum Hill in September of that year. Interestingly, in the advertisement for his final service there is a reference to ‘all workers and the unemployed [being] particularly welcome’ in addition to ‘friends’.<sup>54</sup> This was a further indication, perhaps, of his ‘left-wing’ sympathies.

Wing remained in Basingstoke until early 1932. During 1931 he again demonstrated his ecumenical credentials by preaching at other Free Churches, most notably Immanuel Church. He also spoke at the recognition meeting for the Revd Arthur Sansom, Immanuel’s new minister, held in November 1931, mentioning that the ministers present:

... remembered that each denomination owed a debt to the others. The conflicts of the past were dying out as far as religion was concerned. The problems in these days of difficulty and challenge confronting statesmen and leaders of religion, needed for their solution a great spiritual dynamic. The real crisis was not the gold standard; it was the soul standard. He hoped ... [Immanuel] would continue to play her part in emphasising the absolute importance of spiritual things in human life. He believed they had in their new minister a man who would see the things needing to be done and do them, and a man who knew the things needing to be said and say them. In the name of the Baptist denomination he much pleasure in welcoming Mr Sansom to the town.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>51</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 November 1929.

<sup>52</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 November 1926. There were two vacancies and Wing topped the poll.

<sup>53</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 November 1927. He again topped the poll.

<sup>54</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 27 September 1930.

<sup>55</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 13 November 1931.

Given his close links with Immanuel it is unsurprising that he received and 'accepted a unanimous invitation to the pastorate of Goring-on-Thames Free Church (Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion) with the branch church of South Stoke.'<sup>56</sup>

A new minister for Sarum Hill Baptist Church, the Revd John H Huntley, arrived in March 1932, having previously served for five and half years in Wimborne. Described as 'a strict evangelical ... quite a young man and ... possessed of much earnestness' he had served in the army during the Great War and been 'badly wounded.'<sup>57</sup> At his recognition meeting the hope was expressed that 'he would be ... [there] for a good number of years.'<sup>58</sup> This, however, was not to be the case and he left after three years for reasons which are not known.

Huntley's replacement was the Revd John Hill, who came to Basingstoke from Bournemouth. At his 'well attended' recognition services and meeting held in July 1935, Baptist ministers from Bournemouth played leading roles in the preaching and commissioning.<sup>59</sup> Just a year later, at celebrations to mark the Church and pastor's anniversary in June 1936, Hill was presented with 'a gold watch as a token of the appreciation and affection of his flock.'<sup>60</sup> This was a clear indication of the impact he had made in a relatively short space of time.

At some point, it is not clear when, Sarum Hill 'severed its connection' with the Baptist Union, the Hants Baptist Association and the Baptist Missionary Society and affiliated to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches. However, it continued to be known as Sarum Hill Baptist Church. This triggered some correspondence in the *Hants and Berks Gazette* during the early months of 1937. In the view of Fred Dunster, it was 'misleading to the public for the prefix "Baptist" to be used by the officials, organisations, or for it to be used on public notices.'<sup>61</sup> There was rejoinder to this argument from W. Arnold Radford who expressed the view that 'Basingstoke was no less a Baptist cause because it was independent.'<sup>62</sup> This correspondence also prompted a letter from the Secretary of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, who explained the position in the following terms:

... [his organisation] did not come within the category of a "Denomination" as does the Baptist Union, but is a "Fellowship" of Churches holding what is known as the "Fundamental" position, as opposed to the "Modernist" position. In our membership we have churches and missions of varying forms of service and constitution ... provided, always there is loyalty to the Scriptures ... a number of ministers on our accredited list are pastors of churches in the Baptist denomination.<sup>63</sup>

As indicated, notwithstanding some concern, the Church continued to use the designation "Baptist".

A particular occurrence of note during Hill's pastorate was the installation, in 1937, of a small pipe organ, which was presented to the Church by Mrs Stainer of Eastleigh in memory of her parents, who had worshipped there. Although the organ was not a new one, it having been purchased from Eastleigh Baptist Church, members of Sarum Hill paid for its renovation and installation.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 15 January 1932.

<sup>57</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 26 February 1932.

<sup>58</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 25 March 1932.

<sup>59</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 July 1935.

<sup>60</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 19 June 1936.

<sup>61</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 5 February 1937.

<sup>62</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 12 February 1937.

<sup>63</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 2 April 1937.

<sup>64</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 30 November 1937.

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, in December 1939 Hill resigned to begin a 'new life as a medical orderly in the R.A.M.C. [Royal Army Medical Corps].' As the *Hants and Berks Gazette* felt moved to observe, 'his action must arouse the keenest admiration of the townsfolk.'<sup>65</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Although the Strict Baptist cause in Basingstoke had ceased to exist by 1939, the Open Baptist cause continued to thrive. Served by a succession of diligent ministers, it had proved to be a worthy addition to Basingstoke's array of Free Churches since its foundation in 1908. Notwithstanding doctrinal differences, in particular over the rite of baptism, Sarum Hill Baptist Church was ecumenically minded and collaborated enthusiastically with the churches of other Nonconformist denominations. From its early days, ministers and lay members participated in the week of united prayer and pulpit exchanges. While the Church's Christian Endeavour Society was a member of the Basingstoke and District Christian Endeavour Union. Moreover, while there was some dispute over the use of the designation "Baptist", Sarum Hill continued to represent this particular strand of Nonconformity within Basingstoke's community of dissent.

Roger Ottewill  
November 2018

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<sup>65</sup> *Hants and Berks Gazette*, 8 December 1931.