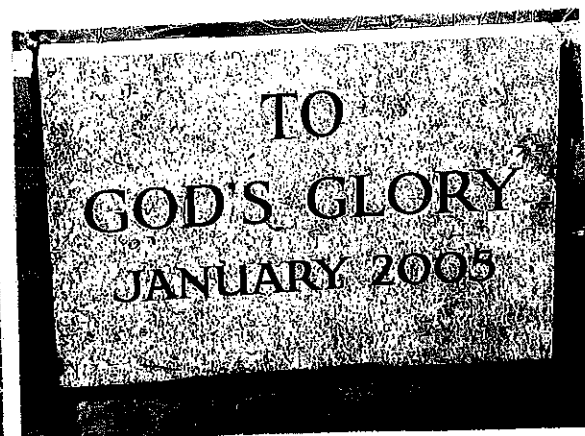
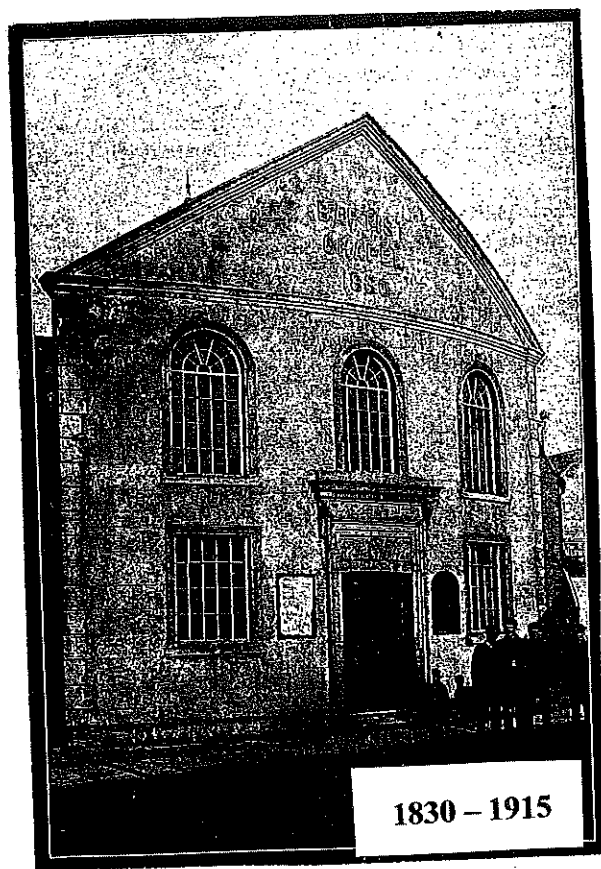


A BRIEF HISTORY OF DORFORD BAPTIST CHURCH IN CELEBRATION OF THE RE-OPENING OF DORCHESTER BAPTIST CHURCH

SEPTEMBER 2005



A Brief History of Dorford for the Re-opening of Dorchester Baptist Church – September 2005

Background

It is generally acknowledged, even before 1830, from which date full records of Dorford survive, that the founder of the church was a Cromwellian soldier named Allen – a Baptist who was in Dorchester led by the Earl of Essex. It is recorded that Allen preached somewhere in the town in 1645 – our first Baptist “service”. It also corresponded with the end of the English Civil War.



Charles I
(1625 – 1649)



Royalist/Cavalier
soldiers

versus



Oliver Cromwell



Parliamentarian/Roundhead
soldiers

By 1653 the Dorchester church, the first Dissenting (Non-conformist) denomination, was mentioned in Baptist records but its minister is unknown. It appears that at first it had a church building as evidenced when George Fox (founder of the Quakers) visited Dorchester. From Fox's records he describes asking the Baptist minister for permission to use the Baptist Chapel. For some reason, permission was refused!

In 1658 the Western Baptist Association met in Dorchester with 300 delegates attending, at The George Inn (on the site of the County Museum), as they were not permitted to meet in a church. This negative attitude originated from Oliver Cromwell's suspicion of the Baptists in the West. In fact 3 spies were sent from Exeter but not wishing to appear suspicious, en route they left their swords in Bridport! Upon arriving in Dorchester, the 3 men were informed by a recent mayor that he had refused to provide the Baptists with a church in which to hold their meetings.

The first named Baptist minister was Francis Bamfield who took up the pastorate in 1662 although there is no record as to where the place of worship was. Almost as soon as Bamfield took up his position, he with other non conformist ministers were faced with religious persecution:

The Act of Uniformity 1662 made the Book of Common Prayer compulsory in religious services.

The Five Mile Act (about the same time) was aimed at non-conformist ministers. They were forbidden to come within 5 miles of their church and also forbidden to teach in schools. (Interestingly, this Act was not repealed until 1812!).



Puritans of the 17th century dressed in their traditional attire

For one reason, or perhaps for a combination of the above, Bamfield was arrested even though he tried preaching from his own home. Actually, he was not alone – 2,000 ministers throughout the country also refused to comply.

Bamfield was imprisoned in 1662 with 6 other ministers in Dorchester jail for 8 years – for no other crime than preaching the Gospel. This former prison was situated at the bottom of High East Street behind the Casterbridge Hotel and above The White Hart Hotel. Not wishing to waste his time, Bamfield formed a church within the prison, which, it is suggested had links with the Baptist church outside. Each morning Bamfield would go to the prison yard and preach to his inmates, unaware that his sermons were also keenly listened to by the local Dorchester folk who would throng outside the walls to hear him.

In about 1670, still refusing to comply with the terms of the Acts he was transferred to Newgate Prison where in 1672 he managed (somehow) to produce a pamphlet, priced 6d, advocating the seventh day as the Sabbath. It was primarily addressed to the pastor who succeeded him in Dorchester but presumably the pamphlet had a wider distribution. Scant records tell us that in 1672 the Baptist church in Dorchester had two ministers in quick succession – John Dibnam and Francis Nye, the latter remaining until 1689. However, Bamfield's message to Dibnam and/or Nye was adopted and the virtues of the Christian Sunday were enthusiastically preached.

Sadly, Bamfield was never released and after suffering greatly, died in Newgate prison. Perhaps aptly, a Judge Parry wrote, "Dissenters in the West of England were much like the early Christians and following their chosen religion was a dangerous pursuit at any time"

Religious persecution relaxed towards the end of 17th century, resulting in Dorford Chapel being able to occupy at least two premises, believed by some to be in Colliton Street. One of these sites, again unproven, was possibly on the corner of Colliton Street and Glyde Path Road where a small chapel consisted of a room with a burial ground. Details become even sketchier but it would appear that during the latter part of the 18th century the chapel was closed due to declining numbers. The chapel became a beer store and the burial ground became private gardens.

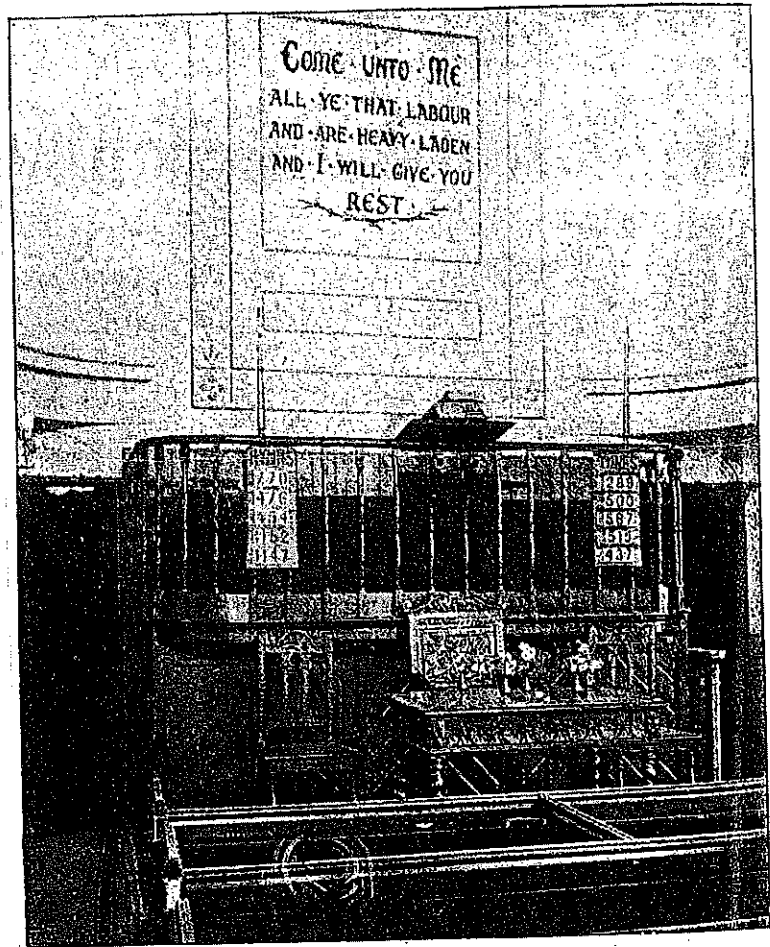
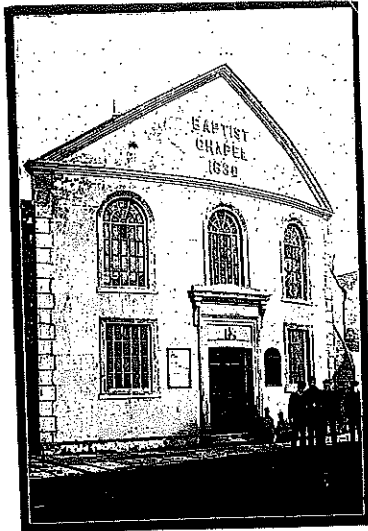


There is no evidence to support the tradition that this was the site of Dorford during the 1700s. However, the thought is still a fascinating one and the garden opposite is still regarded as "sacred ground".

In order to maintain a Baptist witness within the town, its' few members continued to meet once a year, the service being conducted by an invited minister. Throughout this period, baptisms were carried out in the River Frome by The White Hart. This situation continued, perhaps for as long as 40 or 50 years until in 1828, increasing numbers and interest resulted in the renting of a large room for regular worship, this being conducted by Rev Sincox. Enjoying the support of Weymouth Baptist Church, led by Rev Hoby, the decision was made to build a chapel at the bottom of High East Street at a cost of £1250, the debt not being cleared for 25 years. Building began in 1829 and completed a year later. It opened on 3rd June 1830 with Rev Sincox as its' Minister.

(For those not familiar with "Old Dorford", the building still remains and from the exterior appears much as it did when built 175 years ago. During recent years it has been used

as a Jehovah Witness' Kingdom Hall whilst at present it accommodates the Terracotta Army display).



OLD DORFORD, 1830-1915.

From 1830 to the present day, Dorford's records are complete, mainly through Deacons and Members Minutes books.

During the period from 1830 to 1915 when Dorford moved to its' present site, the church saw 13 different ministers. The first, Rev Stephen Sincox, was Minister from 1830 until 1836 and was invited again for a further 9 years, from 1842 until 1851 whereupon he went to Southwell Baptist Church, Nottingham. His successor, Rev George Kerry left in 1856 having been called to India as a missionary under the auspices of B.M.S. (Baptist Missionary Society).

The information which the early Church Minutes contain are interesting, giving minute details as to Dorford Chapel's dimensions and the costs involved for upkeep. The 1840s saw the whole building cleaned for £3. 15. 0 (£3.75), the outside windows painted for £2. 10. 0 (£2.50). The annual premium for insurance amounted to 13/6 (67 ½ p). A scheme to erect iron railings in front of the building was not proceeded with.

Sadly the Committee (Deacons) found it necessary to express their dissatisfaction with the way in which the Door Keeper carried out his duties and he was requested to be more attentive. In addition, he was asked to enter the chapel once a week via the side door in order to maintain the right of way through the passage which led to a Mr Slade's store yard. This action seemed to result in Mr Slade blocking the passageway with ladders. After referring to Title Deeds he is asked to remove them. Although the following chain of events seem petty to most of us nowadays the problem which ensued dragged on for a long time and was the subject of much time and effort to resolve the situation

Aug 20 1849 – further problems regarding a building erected against the vestry wall by Mr Slade resulting in nuisance from drainage from his yard, rubbish and stones from the passage.

Oct 22 – no action taken but a verbal promise received to remove the stones by the end of the week. The problem concerning the building and drainage, however, continued.

Jan 16 1850 – the impasse continued. The stones still remained in the passageway and renewed requests are made for them and the building to be removed.

Jan 23 – further requests are made.

Nov 12 – the stones still not moved. The Trustees prepare to serve Mr Slade with a Legal notice.

March 25 – the stones are unmoved. If not removed by the next day the Trustees would employ someone to remove them and stop the drainage problem.

Dec 3 – to check the side of the premises to see if the problem regarding drainage had been dealt with.

There is no further mention of this saga!

During the early part of Queen Victoria's reign, a scheme was operated whereby the congregation paid a "rent" for their pews, a practice abolished in 1861 with the introduction of free will offerings. An interesting item from the finance book tells of a John Sim who was appointed as sexton at 5/- (25 p) a quarter but in addition was given seats free of rent for himself and his family.

The Western Baptist Assembly was held annually in places such as Montacute, Plymouth, Exeter and Weymouth. Dorford was usually represented, a letter being delivered giving details of the life of Dorford during the preceding year. From these and other records it is possible to examine facts and figures with regard to membership:

Year	Membership	Sunday School Scholars	Teachers
1830	9	-	-
1837*	16	42	5
1840	27	40	6
1850	37	70	12
1860	48	70	12
1870	65	63	8
1880	38	70	6
1890	44	50	8
1900	43	60	9
1910	68	63	10
1915	88	71	12

*the first year statistics were sent to the Western Baptist Association

It is not generally known that Thomas Hardy once visited Dorford. Whilst he was working as an apprentice architect in South Street, Dorchester, Thomas Hardy was befriended by a work colleague, Henry Bastow who invited Hardy, as a young 19 year old, to attend a prayer meeting at Dorford in 1859 during the time that Rev Frederick Perkins was Minister.

Hardy had been brought up in the Church of England but accepted the invitation. Unfortunately, at the same time that the prayer meeting was to be held, Cook's famous circus entered the town and apparently Messrs Perkins and Bastow watched the procession while Thomas Hardy waited for the prayer meeting to begin in the cold, dark vestry. Three quarters of an hour after the meeting was meant to have started they returned to begin the prayer meeting. Not surprisingly, from that time Hardy seemed to have shown little interest in the Baptists. The "ifs" of history play a part with the thought of what may have happened if the circus had not come to town that night. Mrs Hardy in her book on the life of her husband says that the Baptist Minister Perkins and his frugal and austere household won Hardy's admiration by their piety and thoroughness and from them Hardy learnt the necessity of plain living and high thinking.

During the 1860s it was commonplace to see folk from Dorford walking to the outlying newly formed Baptist churches in order to support their services. It was during this period that Dorford was responsible for planting churches in the surrounding villages and even employed a full time evangelist in order to help serve them. The places involved were Bradford Peverell, Grimstone, Broadmayne, Winterbourne Abbas, Buckland Newton and Charminster. The latter village is described as being "where the population is large and more ignorant, drunken and vicious, than the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages" (May 9 1866) (!)

There are several references to Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834 – 92). On two occasions his advice was sought during interregnums with regard to the recommendation of a suitable minister for Dorford. Towards the end of his life Charles Spurgeon is mentioned in the Church Minutes of February 27th 1888 when the following letter was written to him giving Dorford's support in a matter relating to The Baptist Union. Unfortunately there are no details with reference to the matter in question:

To the Revd C H Spurgeon

Dear Sir

Although quite aware that your reliance is on a stronger than any arm of flesh, we have constrained to express our hearty sympathy with your conscientious endeavour to uphold the truth & we trust the result will be ultimately a closer union amongst those who preach the truth as it is in Jesus & who rely solely for their own salvation on his atoning sacrifice.

Signed J J Dalton (Minister)

A further reference to J J Dalton (1883 – 1889) shows him to be a man of generosity At the beginning of 1885, Dorford was in debt to the sum of £27. 14. 3 ¼ (£27. 71) and so at a Church Meeting dated December 10th J J Dalton "told the Church that with their Consent he was willing from the end of the present quarter to receive £1 per week so as to enable the Church to make some effort to clear off the debt, & if at the end of 6 months the Church were in a better position, he would leave it to their honour to do what was right towards him"

The Church Meeting agreed to his suggestion.

It should be noted that J J Dalton's salary at that time was £60 per year.

Church records indicate that the idea of a new church was discussed in 1872 although reasons for doing so are not apparent.

Accordingly, a couple of fund raising Tea Parties (a common occurrence in the life of Victorian Dorford!) were held and receipts for donations towards a "Dorchester New Chapel Fund" were set up.

No. _____

DORCHESTER NEW BAPTIST CHAPEL FUND.

1872 ✓

Received from _____

the Sum of £ _____ : _____ s. _____ d.,

this _____ day _____ 18 _____

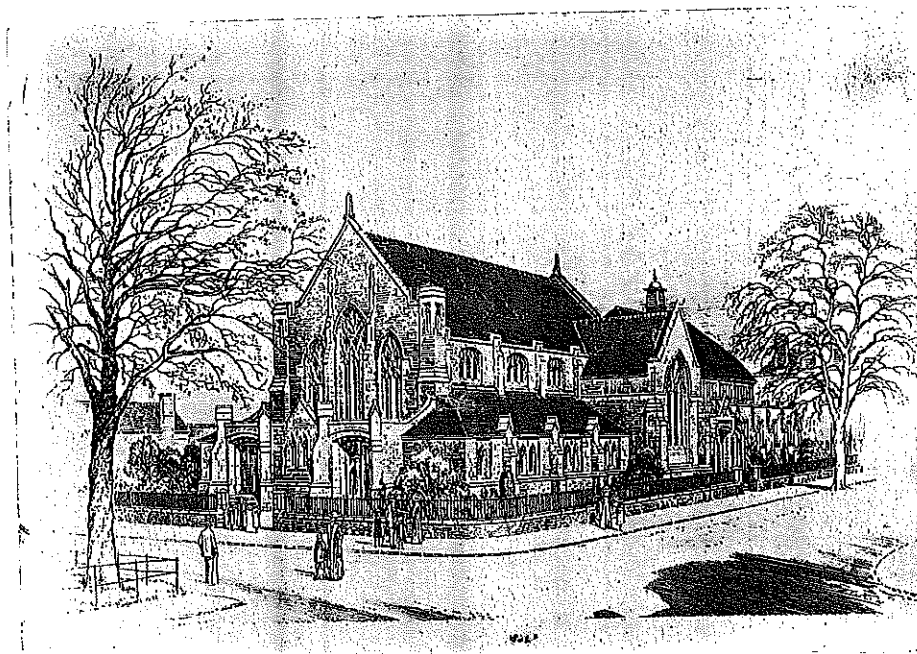
_____, TREASURER.

The date 1872 has been inserted in pencil. On the reverse it simply says, "Not proceeded with".

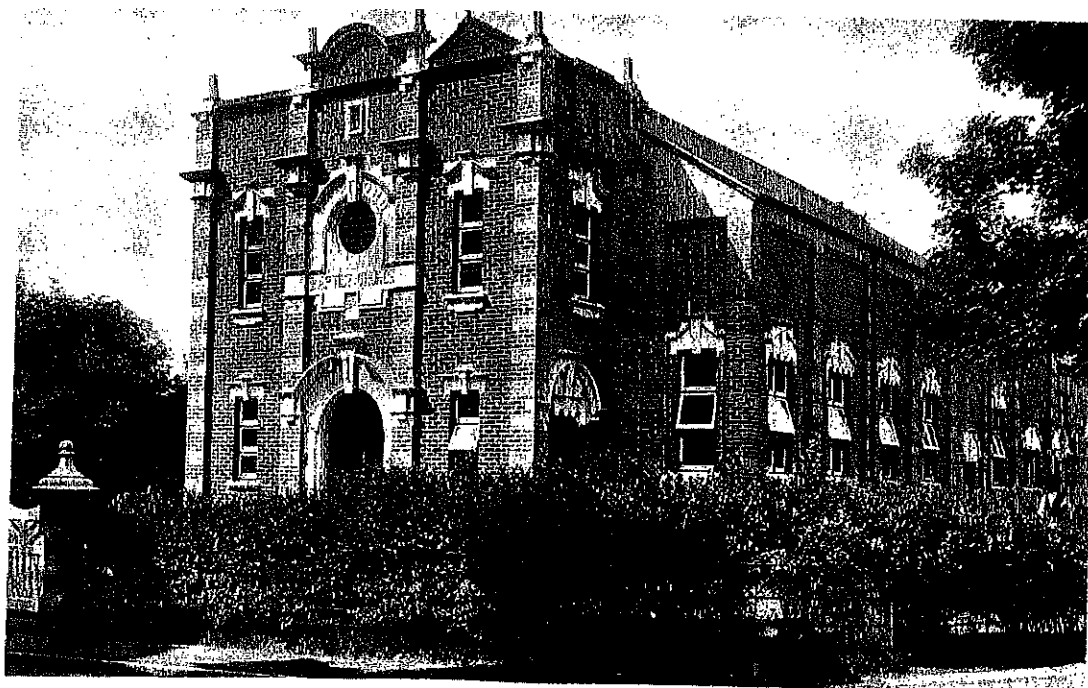
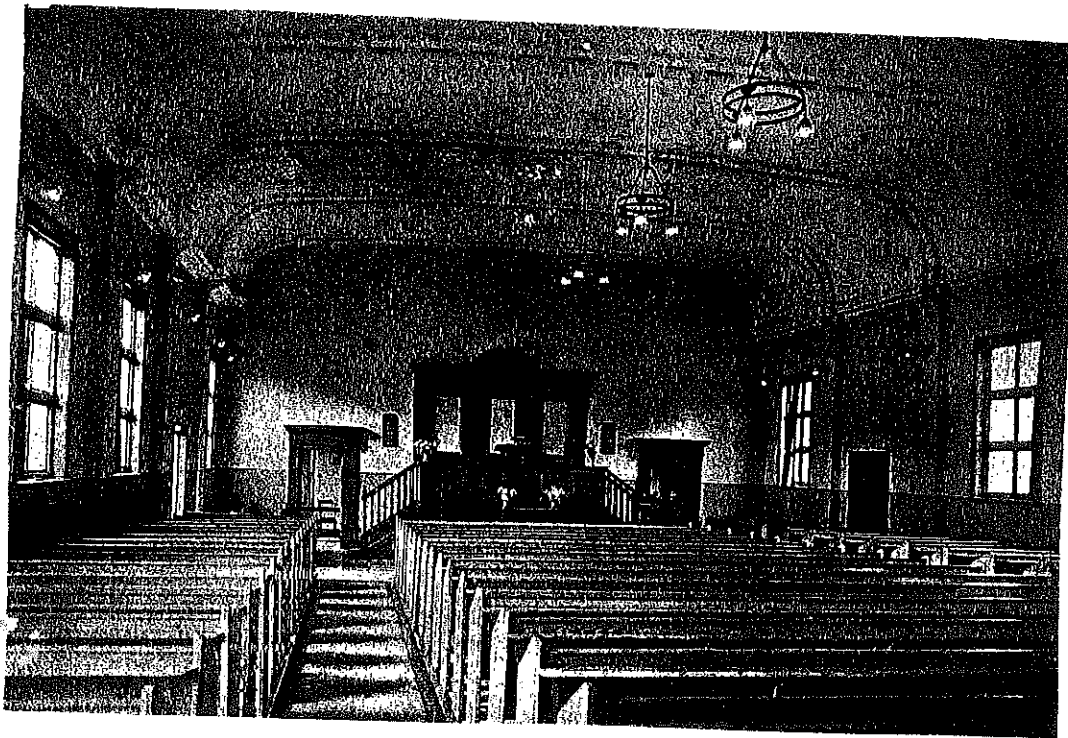
It was not until 1902 when a church (on our present site) was mooted "amid a spirit of unity and boldness of purpose".

This feeling was made even greater by the fact that "Old Dorford" which by then was over 70 years old was "inconvenient, very draughty and very objectionable, especially during winter months".

Documents surviving from the time indicate that the St Mary's Church site at Top o'Town was bought at auction and that a "New Dorford" would cost about £5,000 (although the final figure was nearer to £4,000). The initial sketch of the proposed building bears a striking resemblance to the present St Mary's Church in Edward Road but in the event, the design was rejected in favour of the church that occupied the site for about the last 90 years.



The documents which are to be found towards the end of this booklet refer to the Laying of the Foundation Stone and The Opening of New Dorford in 1914 and 1915 respectively. Although lengthy, they make interesting reading and give an insight into who and what was involved.



The two photographs are the earliest we have of "New Dorford" and date from about 1916

As a result of an appeal for Dorford memorabilia in the local press in July 2005, we received information and a photograph of Miss Ellen Blandamer, the first person to be baptised in New Dorford on April 25th 1915. Her aunt, Beryl Locke tells us that Miss Blandamer was born in 1886 at 48 Icen Way, Dorchester. As a girl she attended the girls school in Icen Way and was taught by one of Thomas Hardy's sisters, possibly Kate. Miss Blandamer worked as housemaid/receptionist for Dr Day at "Glenhurst" in Weymouth Avenue. Whilst in his employment, she was invited to accompany the doctor and his family on a world tour as their companion. Miss Blandamer remained a member of Dorford until her death in 1946.



Miss Ellen Blandamer

In 1919 as a celebration for the end of World War I, it was decided to give thanks to God by making an effort to clear the cost of building New Dorford. £1,250 remained outstanding and although the response was generous, the debt was not cleared completely until 1930 (interestingly, exactly 100 years after Old Dorford had opened). This occasion was celebrated on Thursday November 27th with services and a "Public Tea" - Tickets 9d (4p.)

During the early 20th century, Victoria Park developed and Dorford felt the need to serve that area. At the same time two residents who lived in the new "Park Council House Area" believed strongly that a Mission Church should be planted there. Consequently the couple gave an area of land in Cambridge Road on the condition that a "suitable building be erected thereon within 12 months".

Dorford responded, with brochures produced at the time giving details, including the fact that the church and equipment would cost £1,000. The foundation stone was laid in 1934 with Dorford's Minister Rev E C Ker conducting the ceremony. Originally the church was called The Park Mission although in 1954 it was sold and became the Pentecostal Church and still remains so to this day.

At the beginning of the 1930's The Dorchester Group of Baptist Churches was set up consisting of Dorford, The Park Mission, Buckland Newton, Piddletrenthide, and Winterbourne Abbas. By way of mutual support, a regular magazine was produced entitled "The Torch". Within our archives we have many surviving copies ranging in date from 1937 to 1953, the following year seeing the Group disbanded owing to declining numbers. The various village churches involved closed and were converted into private homes.

However, prior to their closure, Bob Pinkney who became a Member of Dorford in 1934 with his wife Joyce, frequently preached in the Baptist Chapels in Buckland Newton, Piddletrenthide and Winterbourne Abbas. Having no means of transport in those days, Bob thought nothing of walking to and from Winterbourne Abbas in order to conduct services.

The War Years of 1939 – 1945 saw Dorford being used as a barracks for the American troops with bunk beds erected in the Church Hall. Several men “left their mark” by scratching names and dates into the brickwork alongside the old side entrance. Sadly the bricks were not retrieved during the recent demolition work. By way of thanking Dorford, the American soldiers paid to have parquet flooring laid in the Church Hall at which time the old “tortoise stove” (seen in photographs), probably disappeared.

Also during the War, a set of photographs was taken of Dorford in case enemy action damaged or completely destroyed the premises. In addition, it is believed that they would have helped in the case of claiming from insurance.



It was during 1945 that Douglas Jackman M.B.E. wrote a concise history of Dorford entitled, “300 Years of Baptist Witness in Dorchester, 1645 – 1945”.

Mr Jackman was a Member of Dorford from 1912 until 1963 whilst his wife became a Member in 1903 until her death in 1945. They lived in Cornwall Road.

During July 1947 an “Evangelistic Campaign” was held at Dorford, conducted by Rev Ira A. Bentley of Fort Worth, U.S.A. It was reported as “a considerable success: indeed more than was expected owing to the holiday season and the fact that the weather was particularly fine and warm”.

The Campaign Meetings “drew in a good number of soldiers from the Camp at Piddlehinton and Land Girls who were still working in the district. Over 30 professed conversion”.

A family renowned for its’ longevity was the Dufall sisters, Eva, Gladys, Emily and Hannah. They all lived with their parents in London Road until Hannah married William Buckler in 1941 and the couple moved to St Helens Road. All members of the family played an active part in the life of Dorford with Hannah claiming the longest Membership, certainly since 1830 when the Church Roll was started. She was a member for over 85 years until her death in 1990 at the age of 97.

Prior to Dorford's major rebuild in 2004/05, redecoration and refurbishment had taken place on at least twice occasions, notably in the early 1960s and again in the mid 1980s. On the former occasion, Dorford was rewired and the entire interior of the premises (sanctuary, hall and vestries) redecorated. Members and friends carried out much of the labour but a firm of Church Decorators from London executed the work in the Church. This included the sandpapering and re-waxing of the pews (perhaps the first time since they were installed in 1915). Work in the hall carried out on a DIY basis was completed in time to allow Sunday services to be conducted in that area whilst work continued in the sanctuary. This arrangement was to be for "few weeks" but turned out to be 4 ½ months.

During the mid 1980s, Members and friends redecorated the sanctuary and church hall, again on a DIY basis. The sanctuary walls were re-plastered and an audio loop system was inserted. When removed, the old plaster was found to contain horse hair, used as a binding agent.

More recently, the sanctuary floor was treated for woodworm (the fumes of which necessitated the congregation to use the hall for at least a couple of weeks!). At about the same time, Members painted the exterior windows and doors.

Holiday Club for children began in August 1966 under the inspiration of the Church Secretary, Bob Alen. Being immediately successful, further Holiday Clubs were held and they have now become an annual event in the life of Dorford.

The years 1975 and 1976 saw Dorford camping at Bicknoller, in the Quantock Hills in Somerset. In the latter year 50 people attended during the long hot summer, remembered by the attendant drought. So dry were the conditions that someone always had to be left in camp in case sparks from fires on nearby Exmoor should be blown onto the site.

Friday and Saturday evenings in the 1990s saw people from Dorford and the Pentecostal Church serving coffee, playing games, listening to music and chatting to dozens of Dorchester teenagers. This formerly took place in a basement room at Cornhill; it was called JIMs (Jesus In Me) Drop In Centre. Latterly JIMs moved to a specially adapted bus parked in South Street.

During the same decade, many of Dorford's fellowship attended Spring Harvest in Minehead with numbers increasing to over 100 on one occasion. This Christian festival of teaching and praise is still attended at Eastertime alongside Leading Edge that takes place in Warwick during the summer. In 2005 Dorford folk attended the Baptist World Congress in Birmingham.

During Dorford's more recent history its' membership has increased to over 160 with many new folk finding their way to our fellowship. It has become noticeable that Dorford has increasingly become a "sending" church, seeing many individuals and couples moving away in order to serve the Lord in full time Christian ministry. Locations range from East London, Manila and Papua New Guinea to Uganda, Wellington, Birmingham and Japan. In addition, the Church is closely involved in supporting Ukrainian Christians, particularly in the orphanages and prisons, as well as assisting in church building.

With outreach in mind, Dorford has been entering the Dorchester Carnival regularly during the past few years, achieving first place in its Class on each occasion! Also, each Christmas, Dorford participates in Christmas Cracker where the aim has been to give rather than to receive, at the same time inviting passers-by to our Christmas services.

Under the floorboards of the sanctuary, a few days before demolition work began, a sawn off length of floorboard was found. On it was pencilled the words, "Rossiter, Carpenter, Blandford, - 1915 - May 15". Close by was a penny dated 1913, perhaps placed by Mr Rossiter who had left these details as a memento of his work and life, for a future generation to discover. In much the same way, with the help of the fellowship, a time capsule was incorporated into the new church building containing photographs, audiotapes, letters written by our young people and other artefacts relating to Dorford as a memento of our church life in 2005.

Who knows when this time capsule will be found but we trust and pray that when it is discovered, all who have gathered together and worshipped in this place during the intervening years will have met with Jesus in a personal and life changing way.

Although in some ways the 360 year history of Dorford has turned full circle, it is exciting to realise that the small congregation which began in 1645 were worshipping and serving the same Jesus as we do in Dorchester Baptist Church today and that with His help we will continue to do so for the generations to come "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Hebrews 13 v 8).