

History of Attleborough Baptist Church -

Way back in 1921, Attleborough Baptist Church celebrated its first 100 years. A centenary booklet was produced, which contained a history of the cause by someone styling himself *'The Wayfarer'* -- most probably [Rev J H Hawes](#). Much of what follows is what he wrote, with additions in coloured print.



The nation in 1821

It is remarkable what a parallel may be found between the England of a century ago and the England of to-day (3 years after the end of the First World War). A century ago peace had closed the great war with Napoleon, and England was left feverish and exhausted. Taxation was exceedingly heavy, and the National Debt enormous, reaching the unprecedented sum of eight hundred millions. Distress in the country was very great; our industry for a time ran ahead of the world's demands, and the markets at home and abroad were glutted with unsaleable goods. Mills and factories were therefore brought to a standstill. A series of bad harvests caused great scarcity, and in consequence there arose a great discussion upon free trade and what we now call protection. Agitation against machinery became violent, and crime increased alarmingly. ...

Attleborough in 1821

Coming to the Green by way of what is now Kem Street, our forefathers' eyes were gladdened by the view of green fields, and their way impeded often by the brook which ran along the street. Scarcely any of the houses familiar to our eyes were there, and only one or two of the original houses remain as they were then.

Approaching the Chapel from Bull Street there were no houses along the right hand side of the street. Those which are now (1921) dilapidated cottages, stood, and with them one or two small thatched cottages, in one of which a smithy was carried on.

The Square was much what it is now, except that the fronts of many of the houses have been altered. On the Green instead of a factory there were cottages and gardens, and there too was the mill, where some of the present members can remember taking their gleanings to be ground; but that was very long ago.

One great lack might have been noticed by the thoughtful man, and that would have been the absence of any church or chapel. For the public worship of God the people depended upon visiting preachers who held services in some of the kitchens of people whose heart the Lord had touched. ...

The first step forward religiously was due to the interest that the Cow Lane Baptist Church, Coventry*, took in Attleborough. For years there had been a commercial connexion between the City of Three Spires and this quiet village ; now that commercial connexion is to be enriched by a religious connexion. We must remember that a century ago weaving was in full swing in this district. The goods were made upon hand looms in the shops attached to the dwelling houses, and then week by week the pieces were taken to the warehouse at Coventry...



It was largely through the efforts of **Rev. Francis Franklin***, a name honourable in both Baptist and commercial circles in Coventry, that the hopes of many that a House of God might be built at Attleborough, was realised.

In 1810 a preaching station was opened and eleven years afterwards the building of the present chapel was commenced and finished. This was the first place of religious worship to be built in Attleborough. As Baptists we have reason to be proud of that fact, let the present generation not forget this fact, and let not the glory of the past outshine the glory of this present day.

Eleven years later, Manor Court Baptist Church, Nuneaton, was similarly founded, but the outreach came from Wolvey and Hinckley.

The picture at the top of this page was painted on the Sunday School 'New Centenary Banner' and shows what the original building was like. This is before what we now (2001) know as the carpet shop was built on the strip of ground in front of the church.

*The [Queens Road Baptist Church](#), Coventry website has more information about the Rev Francis Franklin and Cow Lane Church.

History of Attleborough Baptist Church - 2

We are still in 1821. Eleven years of outreach from Coventry have borne fruit: the Attleborough congregation now has its own building.

1821 A branch of Cow Lane . . .

At the beginning the congregation that gathered within the walls of the Baptist Chapel were too poor to think of calling a minister. The building of the chapel had in all probability exhausted them financially, but God raised up a number of faithful men, who Sabbath by Sabbath walked from Coventry that they might proclaim the Everlasting Good News to the people of our village.

1840 ... then a church with its own minister

In 1840, the Chapel at Attleborough ceased to be a branch of Cow Lane, Coventry, and a church composed of six teen members was formed, who in true Apostolic succession adopted the New Testament as the rule of their faith and practice. In the same year that the church was formed, the **Rev. John Spooner** was called to the pastorate...

The church found it hard to settle down to its new relationship; there were some criticisms on both sides, the strain of financial obligations was felt.

(He was obliged to supplement his modest stipend of £40 per year by keeping a day school, which failed when the Trinity School opened in 1849.) The church was harassed by well meaning people ... who sowed the seeds of discord in the hearts of the members. The pastor had his faults as all pastors have, and finally in 1854 the Rev. J. Spooner relinquished his post.



A changing village

Attleborough had been growing throughout the first half of the century, thanks to the silk industry. Holy Trinity Church was built in 1842. In 1859, the silk industry collapsed. There was much poverty. Cotton spinning had arrived in the nick of time as the Albion Mills opened on Attleborough Road in 1858.

1854 Pastorless and nearly shipwrecked

There now ensued a pastorless period of eighteen years. A number whose views inclined them towards hyper-Calvinism had broken away. The annals of Jireh Chapel record Thomas Brown and Robert Pope inviting Joseph Orton of Wolvey to meet with them in 1853 for worship 'as the old church has been broken up and one by one they have come to worship with us'. As a result, the Particular Baptist Chapel was founded in 1858. The cause was nearly shipwrecked on the rocks of dissention and trial. All honour to those who stood by the church in those days, and brought her safely through.

1872 Safely through

In 1872, the **Rev. I. Dixon** became minister and continued in that office for about four years... There seems to have been nothing remarkable during this ministry, for such references as are available are very meagre... Despite the fact that 200 sat down to tea at the jubilee celebrations in 1872, only around 20 were present at communion services and the church struggled financially, appealing in 1873 to Cow Lane Church for assistance. Nevertheless, since 1871, there had been a New Building Fund. Rev Dixon took exception to one of the entertainments to raise money for this and resigned, becoming pastor of the church at Tamworth.

History of Attleborough Baptist Church - 3



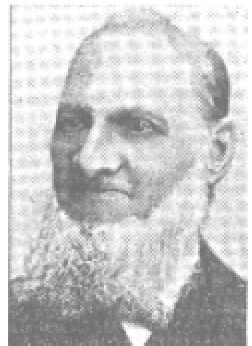
After the hard times of the mid-19th century, Attleborough was thriving again. Its population had doubled once since our church was founded. There was employment on the railways and more in textile mills, including the elastic webbing factory on The Green. By the end of the

century, the village population would double again, thanks to the new residential

areas of Park Street and Gadsby Street (named after [William Gadsby](#), born in Attleborough in 1773, who later became a prominent Particular Baptist preacher in Manchester).

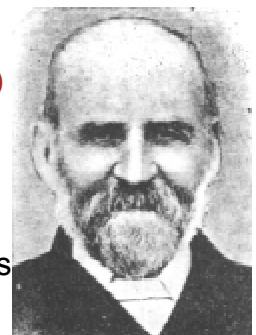
1878 Rise and fall

Less than ten years after a long spell with no pastor, the church had absorbed the spirit of the age and put up additional buildings. This third pastor was **Rev. John T. Felce**, who came to the church in 1878. During his ministry the New Schoolroom and vestries were added to the church in 1881 (see 1921 photograph above). A good deal of controversy arose about this time, and there are still many circulars published on one side and the other upon matters which concern the church alone, and could not therefore be published in a survey of this kind (the 1921 Centenary booklet) even if that were desirable. The controversy seems to have arisen through some slight misunderstanding, and could easily have been stayed by a little Christian forbearance, and a little less sense of dignity on one side, but in the end the misunderstanding ended in the resignation of Mr. Felce, and the secession of some members to the Mission Room in Hall End. (In the eight years that John Felce was our minister, 40 new members joined the church, ten of whom are marked in the Register of Members as "Left for Mission Hall 1886", together with two who become members in 1875. They seem to have left before the minister joined them, since those remaining struggled to pay the minister's stipend. The Midlands Baptist Association paid the difference but Mr. Felce could not accept that the deacons were paying him enough. When the Midlands Baptist Association took their side against his, the findings were printed for distribution to members and to those who had seceded, but Mr Felce could not accept this outcome and left in March 1886, founding in a cottage the chapel we today (2001) know as Hall End Wesleyan Reform Church.)



1885 **Real unity** in the church seems to have been secured during the two years it was without a pastor. The church wisely sought to forget those things that had disturbed its life and hindered its efficiency and strove to bind together in christian love both members, minister, and officers.

1887 **23½ year ministry** Into this new atmosphere the Rev. Walter Satchwell was introduced, and he took full advantage of its life-giving properties. There are still in membership with the church to-day (1921) fifty-two members who were gathered in the days of this long and strenuous ministry. The church flourished, the members were uplifted, and the evangel faithfully and zealously proclaimed. If the super-structure that had been reared upon the Covenant of the first sixteen members had seemed some times to be shaky and unsafe, in the days of Mr. Satchwell's ministry all faults were remedied.



These were the beginnings of better days for the church, the membership

increased, the services were re-organised so far as form went, the Sunday School became more vigorous, officers and teachers felt the breath of this new movement and the church began to take its proper place in the denominational life. Mr. Satchwell was ably helped in his work by his wife, and it was by her energy and skill in needlework, that the present Ladies Sewing Meeting was first formed, an organisation that has been ever a continual help and inspiration to the minister and officers. After labouring faithfully for 23½ years, increasing infirmity at last compelled Mr. Satchwell to lay aside the work he loved, though he ever retained an interest in the affairs of his old church.

1911 Unconventional and sincere



The successor to Mr. Satchwell was **Rev. J. H. Hawes**, who came to the church from the Midland College at Nottingham. His Induction and Recognition Services were held on 7th December, 1911. Perhaps the words of Principal Bowser best describe him :-" Mr. Hawes is unconventional and sincere ; so far as I know he has bent every rule of the college to suit his own liking... You will find he is not one to suit every church, but with loving sympathy you will get the best out of this outspoken young man." ... During the next few years; new organisations were brought into being and

flourished: the young people of the church rallied round the minister the older members gave their sympathy and help, and a spiritual atmosphere was established which made worship seem more real. During the period of this ministry the Great War was commenced, and for two years the church liberated Mr. Hawes from some of his work that he might help in a munition factory at Coventry... **The 1915 Yearbook records a fall in membership from 88 to 78 and in Sunday School scholars from 255 to 213, attributed 'to the poor attendance and lack of interest taken in the work by some of the teachers'. At that early stage of the war, 19 young men of the church had already given their lives.** Sunday and week-night services were well maintained, but owing to some misunderstanding, some hasty words, some pride on the minister's part it may be, Mr. Hawes suddenly resigned at the October Church Meeting in 1916.

1917 Soul winning

The Rev. Hawes left the church in January 1917, and was quickly succeeded by **Rev. George Eales** a veteran in God's service... The key-note of Mr. Eales, ministry was soul winning, and during the period of his ministry many were gathered into fellowship of the church. In February 1920 Mr Eales asked that he might be allowed to take advantage of the opportunity of an early passage to South Africa where many of his family were living and to which place his heart kept constantly turning The church with true christian charity consented, and thus closed a gracious ministry of nearly three years.



1920 The unexpected

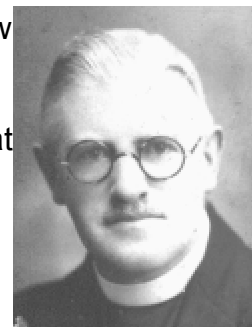
It is often the unexpected that happens in church life as in ordinary life. When Rev. Eales left the church some few ministers came with a view to the pastorate, but none of them with acceptance to the greater majority of the church members. It had been rumoured that **Mr. Hawes** had retired altogether from the ministry, but ... in May 1920 he came to preach as a supply, being then on his way to the Baptist Union Meetings at Birmingham. From that Sunday, full of tender and sweet memories, the thoughts of some turned to the minister they themselves had moulded and trained, and in September of the same year a call was given to him to minister again to the friends at The Green. The church with characteristic kindness and forethought had meanwhile pledged themselves to do all that was possible to double the previous stipend, and right nobly have all honoured the pledge, and that in spite of many hard times.

One hundred years The church celebrated its centenary at the end of October, 1921. There were three services and a 7:30 a.m. prayer meeting on the Sunday. Meetings continued for the next four days, with a concert; reception and *conversazione*; scholars & teachers evening, including action songs and fairy songs; a visiting concert party; and an old world service, introducing hymns and tunes sung in the church in 1821, accompanied by an old-fashioned violin. The Centenary Booklet issued in honour of the occasion has a [members' list](#) (there were 101), photographs of the [Sunday School teachers](#) and of the deacons. With Sunday School numbers over 250 at the beginning of the First World War, it is not surprising that there was a New Building Fund, and that new Sunday School accommodation was a more urgent priority than a new sanctuary. The fund grew very slowly, because money had to be spent on the existing buildings and times were hard during and after the war.

The text of the next two chapters (in black) is taken from a booklet written to celebrate the Church's Ter-Centenary in 1971.

1925 **Building and strengthening**

When the second ministry of Rev. J. H. Hawes closed in 1925, a new pastorate of some twelve years began the same year. The **Rev. John H. Brooks** laboured faithfully at Attleborough, building up and strengthening the fellowship. It was at the height of this pastorate that the New Church School was built and opened in 1930. **The stone-laying ceremony was presided over by the Mayor of Nuneaton, Dr L E Price, and the lesson was read by the Vicar of Attleborough, Rev W F Knight. No fewer than twelve stones were laid, all of which can still be seen.** This was a tremendous venture of Faith, for the times were hard even as they had been at the building of the first Church, yet under **John Brooks'** leadership the Church went forward and the work was completed.



The plan was eventually to demolish the old premises and build a new sanctuary alongside the new "church school". The architect's impression, reproduced here, is taken from the order of service for the stone-laying ceremony and gives a clear

idea of what was proposed. (*Notice how the car in the foreground has been shrunk by the artist so as not to obscure the entrance.*)

We will never know whether the plans for the second phase were a further venture in faith or a pipe dream for a largely working class church with a membership of under 100. It had taken the best part of 20 years to collect the money for this first phase and there were events on the world horizon which would prevent the second target being achievable before the latter half of the century.



In the old church, the Sunday School had been upstairs, but now it became possible to accommodate all the church's activities in the new single-storey building, with a certain amount of furniture shifting and, of course, afternoon classes. What we know (2001) as the carpet shop was then rented out to Mr Colin Butler for his tailoring business. The *Ladies Bright Hour* was started in 1931.

1937 **Pastorless again**

In 1937 Rev. J.H. Brooks accepted a call to Reading, and for two years the Church was pastorless.

1939 **The war years**

The **Rev. John J. Giles** came in 1939 after a period of two years without a minister and led the Church through the very trying and difficult war years.

May 17th, 1941 was the most significant date of this period, the night of by far the heaviest air-raid on the town. Amid the human carnage and destruction of property, Holy Trinity Parish Church did not escape: it was completely bombed out. The hand of Christian friendship was extended and, for many years afterwards, Anglicans and Baptists shared our church on the Green, alternating between Non-Conformist and Prayer Book styles of worship. (This co-operation is still remembered in May each year as we meet together to share a Sunday evening service.)



Six long years

John Giles resigned in 1944 to take up an educational appointment. There then followed six long years without a Minister. Much of the reason for this long spell was due to the lack of an adequate Manse. It was during this period that the Church embarked on another venture, and undertook the building of the present Manse in Highfield Road.

1950 **Back on our feet**

With the completion and opening of the Manse, a call was extended to the **Rev. Arthur Gray** who began his Ministry in 1950. It was under



this ministry that the pipe organ was installed in the Church in 1952, adding to the beauty of worship. It had previously been in the chapel at Gopsal Hall. In 1955 Mr Gray received an invitation to Gosport, and left in September of that year.

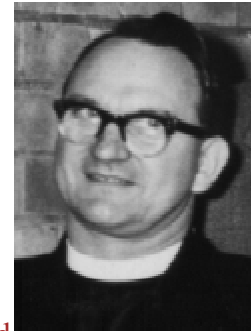
The country was beginning to get back on its feet after the war and, with little competition yet from television or car ownership, the church involved people socially several nights a week as well as on Sundays. Like towns everywhere, Nuneaton was expanding outwards and grand central churches were no longer best for its increasingly sprawling population. Attleborough was becoming engulfed and no longer such a significant centre in its own right. Our church had set aside its 1920s plans for an imposing new sanctuary in favour of much needed flexible accommodation.

1956 Fifteen year ministry

In November 1955, less than two months after Rev. Gray's departure, the Church called **Rev. Trevor L. Landon** to the pastorate and his ministry commenced on 1st February 1956.

The new Church Hall was dedicated on 2nd December 1961. The opening ceremony was performed by Miss Sarah Bosworth and Mr. J. Wolfe, who were at that time the two oldest members of the Church.

Attention then turned to the interior of the church. A new pulpit and choir screen were given in memory of Mr & Mrs Alfred Denny in September 1963. A carpet and many other gifts of furniture were donated at this time in memory of former stalwart members or in thankfulness for blessings received. (It was to be another thirty years before the last vestiges of the old church - the wooden benches - would be replaced.)



Almost at the end of Mr Landon's time, in May 1970, Dennis Rice began his epic service as Church Secretary.

Trevor's ministry in Attleborough lasted 15 years and is remembered with great warmth by all who knew him. The eve of his departure, 1 June 1971, was the occasion of a civic farewell in the Mayor's Parlour to mark his involvement in the life of the town.

History of Attleborough Baptist Church 7

After a 15 year ministry, Rev. T.L. Landon received a call to Reading and he left Attleborough in June 1971. The church celebrated 150 years of work and witness in October of that year, producing a Ter-Jubilee booklet on which the two most recent of these chapters have been based.

A striking statistic, looking back over just the last century, is the size of the Sunday

School relative to the number of church members. Our membership has probably never reached 100, whilst there have certainly been times when we have had over 250 children. Over a long period, the church struggled to find enough committed teachers. It is perhaps no surprise that we have failed to hold on to children who were *sent* rather than brought to church.

1972 Brief ministry



One year later, the church inducted **Rev Harold J Hyde**. Together with his wife and four daughters, he came to us from Yorkshire although he was born in Monmouthshire and trained in South Wales. Though a minister of ten years' experience, he was unable to work effectively amid the challenges to his ministry from some quarters. He resigned after little more than two years without a call to another church. With nowhere else to go, he lived on in the manse with his family whilst the church was seeking his replacement. He eventually resumed employment on the railways.

1975 Brave start

1975 When **Rev Brian Scott** began his ministry in August 1975, he had to leave his pregnant wife, Janet, in South Wales because, in the words of our local paper, "the former minister and his family are occupying the Manse". During their seven years amongst us, the Scotts had three daughters. It is perhaps no surprise that this was when the mid-week Mother & Toddler Group started! In late 1981, Brian was called to Nailsworth, Gloucestershire and has since moved again to Pill, west of Bristol.



1982 Three years without a minister

Our church has been without a full-time minister for a total of over 35 years since it was first able to afford one in 1840. Was this the result of cautious hands on the purse strings or lack of clarity about whom to call? At such times, the worship and witness of the church go on and we are served by willing and gifted lay-preachers - but it becomes harder to maintain the vision and to plan for the future.



1985 The expanding community

In 1985, we looked once more to South Wales to fill our vacant pastorate. **Rev Vivian Rees** came to us in March, with his wife Margery and daughter Carys. During his ministry, efforts were made to visit the growing number of people coming to live to the south and east of us, for whom we were the nearest church, and to reach young people through Holiday Clubs. Viv also served the community as an assistant chaplain at the George Eliot Hospital. In 1996, he moved to Long Eaton, Nottinghamshire.

1996 New experience

While women have been ordained ministers in the denomination since 1925, it is only in the last 20 years that they have come into our Theological Colleges in any numbers. Attleborough apart, many churches are unwilling to invite a woman even to discuss their vacant pastorate. Rev Jenny Few came to us straight from Northern Baptist College. Her reflective style of worship and leadership no doubt benefit in part from her having trained later in life after a career and raising a family. Jenny moved to the Robert Hall Memorial Baptist Church, Leicester, in June 2005.



2006 The next minister

Rev Andy Jones was invited to take up the pastorate in September 2006.

How do you write a few words about what your minister is like?

Being a minister is only really possible if God's blessing is on your life. Andy is greatly blessed by God, he has giftings in worship and prayer and a love for people. He has a great smile and a dry sense of humour. We are glad he is our minister and that God called him to Attleborough Baptist Church.

