

An early chapter in the history of Dormans Land Baptist Chapel

(Reprinted from the Gospel Herald (or Poor Christian's Magazine) of April 1851).

This church after having been about five years destitute of a stated ministry, has at length, we are glad to learn, had a pastor settled amongst them, whose ministry is received with acceptance, and whose labours have been blessed for good.

The following outline of the interesting circumstances connected with the rise and progress of this church, will, we think, be perused with interest by our readers.

Previous to the year 1775, there was no meeting place for Dissenters near this locality, and, with two or three exceptions, gross darkness covered the people.

About this time, a poor man in the neighbourhood, became enlightened to see his lost state as a sinner, and, having sought in vain for peace of mind in the churches of the establishment, his distress became very great. Hearing that the gospel was preach in Sevenoaks, he determined to go there, and frequently repeated his visits, till at length his heart was filled with joy and peace, from a persuasion of his pardon and acceptance in Christ.

Some time after, having met with three or four others who had become serious and thoughtful, this *first* convert to Jesus in this part determined to open his cottage for preaching. This was no sooner done and a person found to speak there occasionally, than a storm of persecution arose: week after week the windows of the cottage were smashed, and the worshippers pelted with all sorts of missiles: while an incessant noise was kept up by shouting, blowing horns, thumping kettles, ringing bells, etc.. An effigy of the 'Methodist parson' as he was called, was also carried to and fro, and afterwards burnt on the common. The rabble were kept in countenance by their superiors, who, smoking and drinking at a short distance, watched the proceedings of the mob. Appeals were made to the magistrates, but no redress was obtained. Afterwards application was made at Bow Street, London, and two officers went down, thinking by their presence to allay the tumult; in this they were mistaken, and compelled to return, and send armed men down, who, by threatening to shoot the first person who insulted them, kept the mob at bay. The magistrates soon received a letter from London, which obliged them to fulfil their duty, and in consequence some of the ring leaders were arrested, and the little band were enabled to proceed with less molestation, though awful afflictions befell some of their persecutors.

There was at this time a little company of believers residing in a place called Handcross in Sussex, who had Mr Humphrey for their minister. The few at Dormans Land were considered a branch of that church; Mr Humphrey preached to them once a fortnight, and at length, in 1786, a small chapel, 28 feet by 16, was erected. In 1791, he discontinued his visits and the chapel was supplied by various ministers, one of whom baptized five believers in a brook near Edenbridge.

In the year 1792, these believers were formed into a church, consisting at first but nine members. One of their number, named Chapman, was soon found to possess a gift of speaking to the edification of others. When a little boy, he had witnessed the tumult occasioned by the introduction of the gospel into his neighbourhood: he a little later in life assisted in the erection of the house for the saints to worship in, and *now* it appeared that he was being qualified to labour as an instrument in the erection of the spiritual house. He was invited to speak occasionally; this he did with such acceptance, that the work soon devolved upon him, and he was unanimously chosen to take the pastoral office. He began to preach in 1793, and ended his labours entered rest in 1844.

By the year 1804, about 60 had been baptized and added to the church. The place having become too strait for them, an enlargement was made, and also this being soon found to be too small, it was resolved after much deliberation to take down the old, and to erect a new meeting house, 40 feet by 34. This was opened in 1817, when three sermons were preached by Messrs Upton, Chin and Shirley.

In a short time the front and side galleries had to be erected, the whole of which have long been paid for. During his pastorate Mr Chapman preached regularly in several villages around; many were converted to God and added to the church at Dorman's Land until as believers multiplied, they were in a condition to form a church, and have a meeting-house and minister in their own locality. Thus, directly or indirectly, through the preaching of the gospel here several other churches have been formed around, though few now agree with the original church in doctrine and discipline. Mr Chapman entered into his rest in 1844, having during the period of his ministry, which was about 50 years' duration, baptized 300 persons. After his death various ministers occupied the pulpit, but the prosperity of the cause began to decline; that unanimity which seems essential to progress was not present, and none being added to them, their number gradually diminished.

Such was the state of affairs in 1849, when the present minister of the church, Mr T Grigg, a member of the church under the late Mr Stephens, of London, first went to supply them. After preaching to them with acceptance for two months, he received an unanimous call to the pastorate; this however he declined then to accept, feeling desirous to see the hand of the Lord more clearly in this matter. He continued however to preach regularly each Lord's day, having travelled nearly 80 miles to do so. In the spring of 1850 the congregation began to increase, and the church became much more united than formerly, many expressed interest in the things they heard, who had not done so before while a few were anxious to give themselves to the Lord by baptism. Six candidates were baptized on the 12th of May, and the church encouraged by such an increase, renewed their request to Mr Grigg, to come down and take up his abode amongst them, a request which he then felt himself unable to refuse. On the first Sabbath in August he commenced his stated labours, and the blessing of the Lord appears evidently to rest upon his labours.

On Lord's day, November 24th, eight believers were baptized, and, with two others who had been previously baptized, took their seats at the Lord's table on the following Sabbath. Others are proposed for membership, the congregation is much larger than formerly, and the prayer meetings are well attended. The present number of members is between 60 and 70. Most sincerely do we trust that the Head of the church may continue to bless the labours of his servant in the locality, and that the church may enjoy continued peace and prosperity.

During the pastorate of T Grigg, which lasted nearly 35 years, 104 persons were added to the fellowship of the Church. For the first nine months of 1885 the church was served by supplies one of whom Isaac Near was called to the pastorate, he commenced his stated labours Oct. 1885 and resigned June 1890. The church being without a pastor sought supplies and in August heard and invited its present pastor R Wilson, who commenced his ministry Oct. 1891. Since the formation of the church in 1792 three other Baptist churches have resulted from labours, those are - Edenbridge, Plaistow Street and Outwood. The depression in the Agricultural interests has greatly affected the cause. If the church is to continue to witness for the truth something must be done to make the chapel brighter and more comfortable; hence we make this appeal to your sympathy and support.

"Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because that with perfect heart they offered to the Lord." 1 Chronicles 29:9

Prepared for the Centenary of the opening of the chapel held in July 1892.

Sold price Twopence, to be appropriated to the funds of the Chapel.