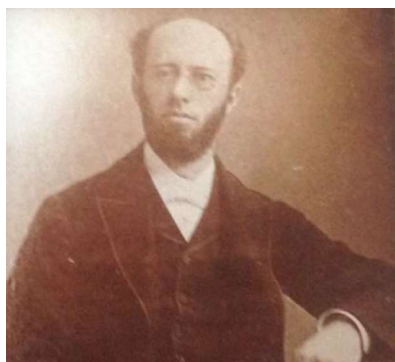


The “New Chapel” building project – 1881 to 1886

The first meeting of the Congregational Chapel Building Committee took place on 24th October 1881. It was held at the Minister's house, **Revd John Pither**, who chaired the meeting. The members of the committee were Messrs **H M King** (Treasurer), **J Price**, **Edwin** and **James Reynolds**, **J W Reading** and **William Bates** (Secretary). The building of a new chapel was fully discussed and various designs in the Congregational Church Year Book were looked at. The Treasurer "kindly offered" £1000 if the "Friends" would make efforts to raise the remainder, estimated to be a further £1000.

The Minister wrote to the **Chapel Building Society** to ask what assistance they could give towards the expense. They in due course offered a loan of £200 free of interest repayable over 10 years which we accepted.

The seating capacity was discussed - 250 on the ground floor and 75 in the gallery.

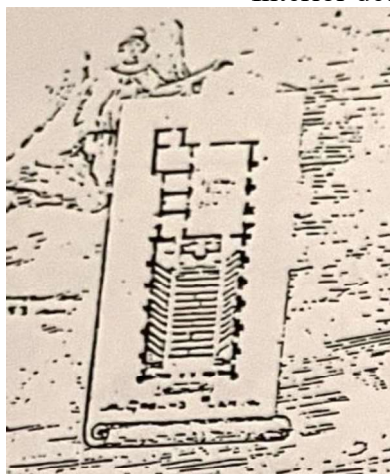


Revd John Pither

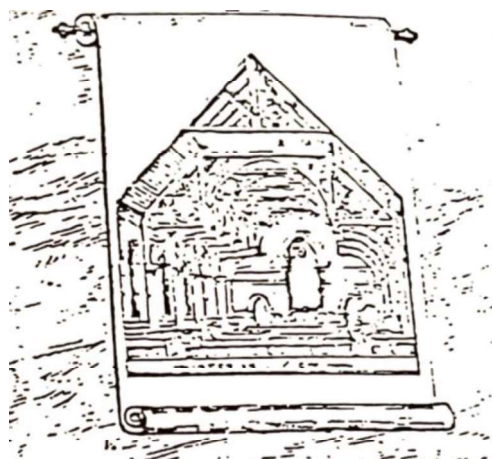


Later proposal to add fleche to chapel roof rejected

Interior details from the architect's drawing:-



Pew arrangement with proposed angled side pews



Hammer beams

Mr William Gilbee Habershon of Habershon and Fawckner of 38 Bloomsbury Square, London was chosen as architect and he accepted our invitation to tender, making a visit to Chesham in April 1882 to see the site, submitting plans, then returning in May with suggestions and to discuss the arrangement of the school classrooms. The building was to be built of flint with stone dressings.

Mr Habershon's plans and specifications were submitted to **Mr Conder** of the Chapel Building Society who responded that there should only be one "flèche" (an arrow-shaped turret adorning the roof) and suggesting lowering of the roof by 3 feet.

There was much fundraising activity from this point in time – fundraising meals, children's and Ladies Committee with collecting cards, building committee members visiting neighbouring towns to solicit subscriptions. Investment discussions took place. At the end of 1884, particulars of the probable cost of the building were made and the project was set in motion.

The project gets under way!

In November 1884, **Hot Water Engineers** were consulted as to whether coils or continuous pipes were best for heating the building. It was decided that the Chapel floor and aisles should be level throughout. The tender from

Messrs Honour and Son, Builders of Tring was accepted, that they should commence the build on 1st June 1885 and it be finished by 1st January 1886. The roof should be on by 1st October 1885. In September 1885 when that stage in the build was reached, it was decided with Mr Habershon not to add the flèche.

Mr Habershon was to appoint the Clerk of Works, their wages not to exceed £3-3-0 per week and not to be employed longer 'than possible'. **Mr Gilling** (Gillan?) was appointed, and **Mr Russell** as Foreman. Mr Habershon was asked to plan the Foundation stone. Mr Gilling submitted patterns of corona gas burners and 10 of the best were chosen. Mr Habershon engaged **Mr Berry** to design and install the heating. Mr Habershon was asked to design the case for installation of the new organ from **Forster and Andrews of Hull** whose tender had been accepted. The boundary wall on the north side was to have the inscription 'This wall is the property of the Congregational Church'. Mr Gilling's proposal that the side seats (pews) should be in line with centre seats, not angled towards the centre as in the original design, was agreed with Mr Habershon.

Demolition and Salvage

Mr Freeman, the Auctioneer was to be asked to sell the old building as one lot and the front fence as a separate lot. In the end, there were four lots:— Lot 1 schoolroom, Minister's Vestry, scullery with sliding doors; Lot 2 chapel with pews and galleries; Lot 3 the front fence with gates (fetched £101). Flagstones with any of the lots; Lot 4 the organ, to be tuned then advertised in Christian World and the Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire and Hemel Hempstead papers. No reserve price was to be put on it. The purchaser of the building materials was to pay 10% deposit and the remainder in 2 instalments in 3 and 6 months.

The items that were not to be sold were the memorial tablets, the clocks and the offertory boxes. **Mr Bingham** was to remove the tablets from the chapel and Schoolroom and replace them undamaged in the new building.

Mr Mead was to remove the flagstones and purchase the bricks of the paths round the building, and arrange removal of the clocks and the gas meter. The blind rollers were to be taken down.

The forms and tea service from chapel and Schoolroom and whatever was needed were **transferred to the Temperance Hall** for worship, Sunday school and committee meetings to continue there. **Mrs Bunker** consented to store the surplus on her premises.

Mr W Jordan was asked on what terms he would supply a photo of the old chapel.

In late March 1885, the front fence and gates were auctioned. By late April 1885, the old building was already being removed when, on 23rd April, the last public meetings were held in the old chapel - a Valedictory Service in the afternoon and a public meeting in the evening in which an account was given of the monies collected to date.

Laying the Foundation Stone – 24th June 1885

A very public event was organised with wide advertising round Watford, Berkhamsted, Amersham, Missenden, Aylesbury, Tring, Hemel Hempstead, Wycombe, Rickmansworth, Uxbridge, Wendover, the Chalfonts and Chenies. There was to be a luncheon for 50 guests, tickets 2s 6d. Mr Gilling and Mr Rogers were to be given their tickets free. The workmen were to be paid for the afternoon off whilst the event took place. Mr Saunders at The George did not respond to the invitation to provide the lunch, but **Mr Sells** agreed to 2s 3d per head for not less than 50 persons. 60 guests enjoyed the luncheon in the General Baptist Schoolroom at 1.30pm, which was followed by many speeches. The Foundation Stone was to be laid at 3.00pm and tea at 8d to be at 5.00pm.

Flags had been hung over the empty site and seating arranged for ladies. Everyone adjourned to the site and the formalities duly took place at the appointed hour with a large crowd watching.

The foundation stone bears the inscription:-

“This Stone was laid by Albert Spicer Esq. J.P. of Woodford
June XXIV. MDCCCLXXXV.
JESUS CHRIST himself being The Chief Corner Stone
Revd John Pither Pastor”

Also much smaller in the lower corners were to be engraved the details of
the architect - W G Habershon and Fawkner of 38 Bloomsbury Square, London WC
and the builder - Honour & Son, Tring.

It was intended to have quoted the Bible reference:- Ephesians 2 v20.

Gifts and promises of further funds were made by the Spicer family and others. Revd Pither read from a document, possibly our Articles of Faith, which he then placed in a bottle(s) with documents relating to the past history of the church, a copy of “Christian World”, a leading daily newspaper, and local papers. These were then placed under the Foundation Stone.

£138 was added to the funds on this day, leaving a deficit of £300. Honour and Sons builders' costs were to be £1939 and anticipated other costs of buildings and fittings would bring it to a total of £2900. In addition, there would be the cost of the organ - £250.

Progress and detailing

In January 1886, Mr Honour wrote promising to do his utmost to finish the build by the first week in March. Mr Habershon instructed that the spacing between the railings at the front of the gallery should be 6.5 not 9 inches apart.

Mr Gilling was instructed to varnish, not paint, the outside woodwork, and was requested to put a draw-off cock in the hot water pipes. A 25-gallon galvanised iron boiler was requested but this decision was changed back to copper 2 weeks later.

A new 50 light gas meter was to be obtained.

A pattern for the seat rugs was chosen.

Mr Habershon proposed a wrought iron front fence with brick pillars - **Messrs Gardner & Co** submitted 8s 6d per foot of run plus £12 for the centre gates and £7 each for the small gates at each end. The centre gates were to open right back flat and all locks to be the same. Mr Honor's price for the brickwork was accepted.

Mr Honour to supply locks to all outer doors except the front doors.

A design was accepted for the ribbon over the Reredos - 'The Lord is in His Holy Temple', the cost £3-5-0. The wording must have been subsequently changed to 'Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' which we have now.

Miss Devereux (the Postmistress?) asked for the letter box (seen in the 1885 photo on our right hand front wall pillar) to be moved 'at once!' The letter box was transferred to the hoarding for a few days.

The committee agreed to supply a 'chaldron' (3,140 lbs or 28 long cwts) of coal for the heating apparatus. A chaldron was the upper limit for a horse-drawn wagon to haul.

Mr Gilling was made to write a contract that unless he could guarantee that the front fence be completed by 3 weeks from Monday 22nd February, the committee would not have the work done!

3 dozen 4.5"x 5.5" hassocks to be ordered. Later proposed that they should be funded by a sale of them on 9th April.

18" carpeting for the pews and 2'10" matting for the aisles were proposed.

Moving in and further "shopping" and Appointments

2nd March 1886 - Committee Meeting **at the Chapel**

Carpeting for the Minister's Vestry and pulpit were chosen at 3/- per yard. Also, lino for the porch round the mat well. Sennett or openwork matting in well.

Chairs, 3 dozen forms from **Messrs Harman & Co**, hat pegs, umbrella stands and a box seat for packing the tea things were planned for the Schoolroom and lobby.

Hat pegs were to be fixed under the pews in the body of the chapel and the gallery. Handrail and baluster to be fixed and stained.

2 boot scrapers for the front doors.

A pulpit Bible.

30 hymn books for visitors were proposed. 300 hymn sheets obtained from the Sunday School Union.

The four oak plates for the collection were to be polished.

Rakes for the heating furnace.

New tea service and spoons chosen. Also, table cloths, tea cloths and dusters and all ordered.

Mr Honour's tender of 3/- per square yard for Borrowdale flags and cement for the paths by the side of the chapel and Schoolroom was accepted.

Noticeboard for the front of the chapel with "Congregational Church" painted at the top.

Mr Higgs and **Mr Palmer** were to be appointed as Chapel Keepers.

Mrs Higgs to clean chapel at £2 10s 0d per quarter with £1 extra at Christmas.

Mr Downer to lay on water and drain.

Gallery seats to be raised 4 inches.

The Chapel Opening – 19th April 1886

Planning the Opening Service began in February with deliberations over who should be invited to preach. The opening events would begin in Holy Week. 400 hymn sheets were to be printed for the Opening Service.

The choir were to prepare a concert for Good Friday and 50 large advertising posters were to be printed saying “Tea 1/-; evening concert gallery 1/6; body of chapel 1/-; a few at 6d.” **Mr Howard** asked if he could create a temporary platform for the concert. The work performed was the cantata “Joseph” by Beethoven. 200 tickets were to be printed for a Scholars Tea on 20th April.

These events helped to reduce the deficit to £218.

The opening events were very fully reported by The Bucks Herald on 24th April 1886.

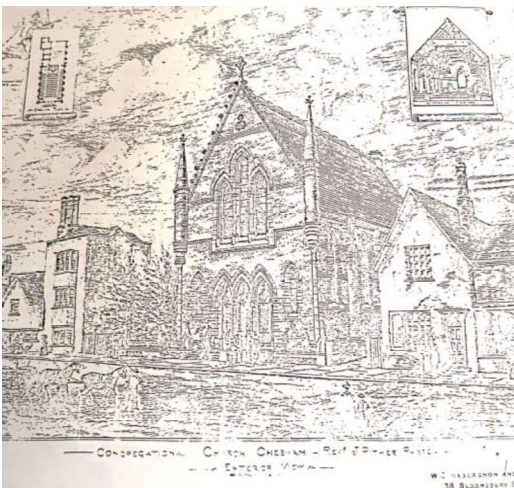
Opening of the Organ – 19th October 1886

Forster and Andrews were ready to install the organ early in October and its formal opening performance was given by **Mr Alfred Penny**, organist of Trinity Church Hampstead at a special Opening Service on the 19th October. Apart from interruptions such as tea and some addresses, he played many solos and accompanied hymns most of the afternoon as well as for the evening service. The choir sang “The Heavens are Telling” from “The Creation”. Revd Pither gave an interesting historical talk on “Hymns and Hymn writers”. The event raised almost £17 for the organ fund.

Cautionary Note

Among other reasons, there is a strong need for a place of Christian worship to continue on this site. In 1885, the descendents of a benefactor back in ~1880 contacted the Building Committee, seeking the return to the family of their ancestor’s gift, with interest, under the terms of his will, should it cease to be a site of Christian worship. One of the Buckinghamshire newspapers had wrongly reported that the church was closing. The Committee waited until the new chapel began rising before they replied! Beware – they could come back!

The Institute



In these two pictures - the architect’s drawing without the flèche and the photograph of our neighbours, the staff of **Wallis’s Shoeing Forge** – there is a glimpse of the forge building, uphill to the right of the church. In 1919, the forge premises was sold, and our church was eventually able to acquire the building and after suitable modifications in 1921, it became “**The Institute**”, a valuable asset of additional space for 90 years for Youth Club, Brownie/Guides, Sunday School, Womens Meetings etc. When finally, it was sold to a hotel development company, the funds raised paid for the modernisation of the church that was completed in 2013.

1975 pictures of Junior Church teachers and pupils on the Institute steps – some familiar faces amongst them:–



Barbara (left of front row)



Marjorie Wallington, Deirdre and Beryl (back row)

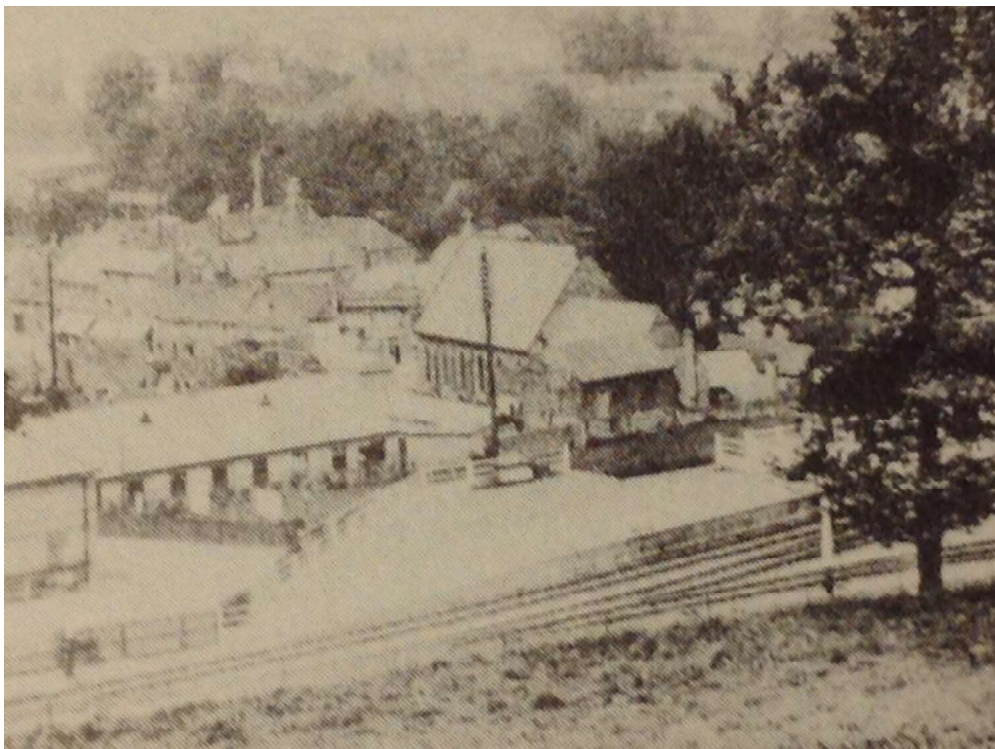


Photo from 1889 after the arrival of the railway

Is this the remains of the floriated cross?

Not very clear but it shows the then Forge building and, below it, our Church with the Schoolroom. Beyond are the buildings of the opposite side of The Broadway with their familiar curve. The church roof still has the floriated cross above the façade which was later removed for safety reasons. This lump of stone above is by Frank's Bank.

A REPORT FROM BYGONE DAYS

(Extract from the Congregational Year Book, 1886)

NEW CONGREGATIONAL CHAPEL AND SCHOOLS, CHESHAM, BUCKS.

The old chapel, standing in a very prominent position in the centre of the town was erected in the year A.D., 1724, but from scanty records in the church books there was a Congregational Church at Chesham towards the close of the seventeenth century. The first pastor of the old building, recently pulled down, was Rev. Dr. William King, afterwards of Hare Court.

A new building with adequate school accommodation, and standing on exactly the same site in the Broadway, had long been needed, owing to the dilapidated condition in which the place had been for some time past.

The church however, did not see its way clear to commence operations till the spring of last year, as the friends had determined from the outset that there should be no burden of debt upon their new place of worship. They preferred to wait a little longer rather than incur any serious responsibility, and thus cripple their resources for future work. After four years of patient waiting and strenuous effort, the sum of £2,600 has been secured in payments and promises, towards the £2,900 required, fully three-fourths of which has been contributed by the church and congregation.

The committee would make a very earnest appeal to outside friends, for their generous assistance towards the remaining £300, the congregation is but small at the present and valuable promises of help have been made, dependent upon the chapel and schools being opened free of debt, which it is their sincere wish may not be forfeited.

The sum of £2,900 includes some additional works, fees, heating furniture, boundary-walls, and organ.

The size of the chapel is 57 feet by 33 feet in the clear, and the walls are 20 feet high to wall plate, and 32 feet to the flat portion of the boarded roof.

There a spacious lobby, 20 feet by 7 feet, opening by three archways, enclosed with folding doors upon a lofty flight of broad and easy steps. The chapel is thus thrown well up, and has a commanding appearance. The ground floor contains about 270 and the gallery 90 persons. The school-room behind is 39 feet by 23 feet, and there are in addition two class-rooms, an infant class-room, vestry and kitchen fitted up for teas. It will be seen by the illustration that the chapel is a handsome edifice of the thirteenth century, and is massively built of flint, lined with crimson brick inside and faced with knapped flint outside; all the external dressings are Box stone, Bath, with angle pinnacles and side windows, darkest red brick Reveals and arches, and bands of same material pointed in black mortar, and continuing as relieving arches over the windows over the windows and doors. The front gable has a richly moulded stone copping with boldly carved crockets, and is surmounted by a floriated cross. The cornice round turrets, the capitals of clustered columns of large window, and the terminals of labels, are carved, and the massive inside corbels are all stone.

All the interior wood-work exposed to the eye is pitch pine, and the hammer beam roof is elaborate. The school-room roof is also of wood boarding, and no plaster is used in the chapel.

The platform is large and handsome, and the side seats radiate. Especial care has been bestowed upon the ventilation both in walls, roof, and windows, which are glazed with three tint cathedral glass, and all the wood-work is varnished twice over.

The contract comprehends all fittings, and include school-rooms, heating chambers, class-rooms, and vestry, only amounts to *£1,939. The heating is to be by hot water both to chapel, schools, and class-room, and lighting by handsome cornice and brackets from design. These two items are contracted for at £200.

The builders are Stevens and Son, of Tring, the clerk of works Mr. Gilling, and the architects W.G. Habershon and Fawcner, of 38 Bloomsbury Square, London, and of Newport and Cardiff.

Note: The floriated cross was removed many years ago as it was considered to be unsafe.

* This would appear to be an error and should be £2939

*A report written before completion of the work, in hope of encouraging donations, with a few inaccuracies. The builders were Honour and Sons of Tring and the side pews never radiated.