

The Origin of Melton Mowbray Baptist Church, and history of its buildings.

The Particular Baptist Church, Melton Mowbray, was formed in February 1867 when a number of people seceded from the Independent Church, now the United Reformed Church in Chapel Street. Their reasons for secession were:

Firstly, they felt that under the current Pastor the spiritual life of the church was declining.

Also that the church organisation was incomplete, its management unbusinesslike, and the Pastor was unwilling that "these evils be remedied".

With regard to the Diaconate, as Deacons died, the Pastor would not allow the election of others to fill their places, thus eventually leaving the church in the control of one deacon and the Pastor.

The Church Books were managed in such a way that the members were in ignorance of the state of the church both numerically and financially which thankfully is not the case today with Owen Twitney in charge of our finances.

With regard to church meetings, the Pastor and his one deacon were absolute, and the suggestions of members if they did not happen to accord with the ideas of the said Pastor and Deacon were "slighted or frowned down." Additionally, church discipline was considered to be very lax, and very little was being done about it, although some members "were guilty of grievous and repeated inconsistency".

The disaffection created and fostered by these "evils" was brought to a crisis at a church meeting held on December 31, 1866. A church member had written a private note to the Pastor remonstrating with him for what he believed to be a neglect of duty, and at the church meeting the Pastor and Deacon contrived to have the member excluded from membership.

This act of "injustice and tyranny" decided a number to secede and as there were several of Baptist principles amongst them, and as it was not wished to establish a rival Independent Church in the town, they agreed to form themselves into a Baptist church. There were 32 founder members.

The Corn Exchange was taken for one year at a rent of £12, and the first sermon was preached on February 3, 1867. The first Pastor, a student of Mr C H Spurgeon's, started his ministry on January 12, 1868.

At an early point, discussion started about building a chapel, and in December 1869 it was agreed to purchase a piece of ground with buildings in Nottingham Street for £500. In November 1870 a decision was taken to gut an old house on the site and make it into a place of worship to be used until a new chapel was built.

A building fund commenced and in October 1872 a quote of £1,180 was

accepted for the erection of a new chapel. During the building works services were held in the Temperance Hall. The opening service of the new chapel took place on Wednesday, May 7 1873 and here the first part of the story concludes.

Fast forward to the 1980s.

With an expanding membership of around 120 in 1985-86 this "new chapel" in Nottingham Street was becoming too small, and as the building had been in a poor state for some years it was decided to sell it and move into Sherard Primary School. We moved out of the church in 1986, and sold the building in 1987 for £90,000. By 1990, due to a congregation that continued to expand, we had moved on to Sarson High School. Church meetings were held in the public library, and evening services at Gloucester House.

Meanwhile we were searching for a site to build our new church. We tried several including Nottingham Road near the council offices, and a warehouse near the station, but in each case we were turned down or met difficulties. Finally we became aware of land opposite the Indoor Bowls Club on Leicester Road. When we submitted our planning application to the Council the miracle was that the land in that area was designated for leisure activities, and under the planning regulations at that time, unknown to us, churches came under leisure activities. For some a debatable argument! We did, thankfully, obtain permission to build on the condition that the building should incorporate a steeple to make it look more like a church! A Baptist Church with Anglican tendencies!

Plans were drawn up, and the search for funds started in earnest. It was a self build project with Main Craig as project managers. The new building was started early in 1992 and opened in November of the same year at a cost of £450,000 plus equipment of £50,000. This half a million was raised by the sale of the old building and the manse, loans of £80,000, and the rest through the donations of members and friends - a great testimony to answered prayer and the faith of the people in what we were doing.

We are grateful for the way in which God worked through a great many people for the realisation of this project, but in particular we pay tribute to the late Rev Frank Rinaldi for his vision of a new purpose-built church, and to the treasurer of the time, the late Mr Geoff Hatton for the calm and capable way he managed the finances.