

History of Castle Combe Independent Chapel

Written by Revd Albert Orr 7th April 1877

An account of the Independent Church at Castle Combe

The oldest record connected with this place of worship is found in a letter of Mr Cennick's to Mr Whitfield Feb 17 1743; he says "On Monday last I set out from the Brethren at Bristol and came to Castle Combe, and indeed my dear Brother I found it a night of power, there was a crowded house and many sweet tears poured out on our Saviour's feet. I went from Combe to Dursley, here I found a second feast, and after we had blessed our Saviour in singing a hymn we prayed and retired for the night; left in the morning for Tetherton [Tytherton?]."

There was much persecution at that time and those who were not ashamed to confess Christ were called "Cennickers" as soon as they made their appearance in the street. Mr Cennick visited this place often and was received very cordially by the Lord's People who met regularly in a cottage at the end of West Street belonging to one William Jones, an old Christian of happy memory; their singing the praises of God in their simple strain was an offence to some who lived near, and on that account it was arranged that the said William Jones should remove to a cottage near the spot on which the Chapel now stands, in which the services were held and a little room fitted up for the use of the Ministers, called the "prophets Chamber" in which slept many worthy men – Mr Cennick, Howell Harris, Captain Joss, Adams, Vines, Hogg of Painswick, Rowland Hill, Mr Winter, Mr Jay, and many others.

In the early part of the year 1752 Mr John Croom of Gloucestershire came to Combe, not as a preacher; but to hold a Conference with a little prosperous Society which in that village walked with great decorum, and received help from the Ministers who preached at the Tabernacle at Bristol. In this place Mr Croom also preached his first and last sermons after which he went with a friend to Nettleton where he passed the night. In the morning he complained of indisposition and expressed a wish to be taken to Christian Malford, which his friend complied with: he lingered until Friday and then sweetly slept in Jesus.

In 1757 a small chapel was built, and many years afterwards was enlarged. About 1769 Mr Whitfield preached under a tree opposite, - the chapel being too small to hold the number of people assembled, who were much delighted to hear him. In his letter he says – speaking of his last visit to Wilts "the trip was attended with remarkable success at Chippenham, Castle Combe, Dursley, and many other places", to almost all of which Lady Huntingdon, and Lady Erskin accompanied him. "Never were these places so endeared to me as at this last visit, Old Friends, of Gospel wine, and the great Governor ordering to fill to the brim."

On Oct 2nd 1777 Mr Winter says "I was ordained to the three Societies at Castle Combe, Christian Malford and Chippenham in Wilts" ... "The persons engaged in the services were Mr Joss of London, Mr Williams of Monmouthshire, and Mr Clark of Trowbridge: it was performed at my little Bethel, Christian Malford, and proved a blessed day, honoured by the conversion of a whole family."

A well known writer says "Mr Hogg had some colleagues – Messrs Hill, Croom, Vines, and Captain Joss", all of whom came to Castle Combe – men of the same description as himself, and fit to draw in the same yoke, being of the same spirit, men whose lives were spent in the endeavour to rouse these listless neighbourhoods to a sense of religion. This observation applies to each of them, namely that from the purest motives they engaged in the work of Christ. They did not[,] like too many of the present day[,] recede from the work of God for fear of a flake of snow, a shower of rain, or an apprehension of taking cold from the inclemency of the weather; they were not accustomed to mistake a painted lion for a real one, nor scarcely were they to be deterred or intimidated had a real lion stood in their way.

About the year 1773, Rowland Hill visited Combe and preached one very cold winter morning at six o'clock, from the words "When they arose in the morning Dagon had fallen before the Ark". People came many miles to hear him with their lanterns. He preached generally at Combe on his journeys from Wotton-under-edge to London, and although often in the middle of the day, people found time and crowded to hear him.

Mr Jay visited Combe when quite young and delighted to speak of "the simple manners of William Jones, his wife and other dear Christians."

About the year 1806 Mr Isaac West opened a Sabbath School which was carried on for 30 years".

On [blank] 1809 a meeting was held in the house of Mr [blank] King for the purpose of forming a church, and in 1810 one – Mr Collins was settled over this church, soon after which a Chapel was built at Ford, the cottage of good old Barnard Haskins being too small to accommodate the numbers of people who had worshipped there for many years. It was opened by Mr Sloper and Mr Elliott of Devizes. Mr Collins continued a few years, after which the Church was regularly supplied (chiefly) from bath, the names of Barnard-Harris and Foot are still remembered. Mr Chapple supplied for many years and was very useful in visiting the sick and in many ways helped on this cause "his end was peace". Among the supplies were the names of Savage, Wilmot and Mr Thos King whose ministry is still fresh in the minds of many, and whose labours for upwards of twenty years were not in vain. Somewhere about 1842 the Sabbath School which had been closed for sometime was reopened by the late W. A. Taylor Junr and in 1846 the School Room adjoining the Chapel was erected. At this time Mr Salter, Mr Coates & Mr Moore were among the supplies, the latter for several years labouring also in the district as a Scripture Reader; he was succeeded by Mr Charles King, a man of an excellent spirit, and great sympathy with the people. Shortly after Mr King removed into Somerset Mr (G) Baily came as a supply, which he continued to

do fro nearly three years, when he was invited to become Pastor of this church and on Jan 1st 1860 the Revd Benj Rees of Chippenham & Mr Clark of Hanham took part in the recognition services.”

(The above was copied form a ms kindly lent by Mrs I Holborow of Melksham – April 7th 1897)

Two years after Mr Bailey settled ie. 1862 “Memorial Chapel North Wraxall was erected largely through the efforts and generosity of Mr Isaac Holborow – late of North Wraxall but now of Melksham. Mr Bailey continued the Pastorate till 1874, earnestly and faithfully labouring with the assistance of Mr John Millard in Castle Combe, North Wraxall, Ford, Slaughterford, Colerne, Yatton Keynell, Kington St. Michael, and Giddea Hall – Mr Haddon succeeded Mr Bailey and after two years service gave place to the Revd F. Lowe now of Market Lavington, who after a similar term of service was succeeded by Rev J. F. M Glanville in the year 1880.

Signed

Albert Orr

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