



## History of the Stratton Green Baptist Church

The first church building on this site was built in 1751 by a group of Christians who had been regularly meeting in a house in Stratton Green since 1740. They encountered much opposition from other 'Christians' in the area for being non conformists. John Cennick gathered a mob and persecuted the Stratton Green Christians. It was considered to be God's judgement when he was thrown from his horse and died.

Caleb Bailey of Berwick Bassett left two small fields in Stratton in his will to William Lawrence, a Baptist and Glover of Swindon. This land was next to a small orchard belonging to Mrs Read. This land was acquired and a trust was drawn up for the building and licensing of a Baptist meeting place; and so it was built in 1751.

In the late 1700's Mr Thomas Smith became pastor helped by John Mayell who was a preacher here. John Mayell was born in 1764 and died in 1807. He was buried in Stratton Green graveyard and his stone reads.

"He was a faithful preacher of the Gospel of Christ  
to many perishing sinners in his neighbourhood.  
His labours were blessed in the conversion of souls to God  
Reader, art thou converted. Consider there is no heaven without it."

In 1786 during the pastorate of Thomas Smith another endowment was left to the church by Abraham Atkins, a Methodist from Southwark, to be divided among the congregations of Protestant Dissenters who scrutinised against infant baptism. In 1791 Mr Atkins left a further £2,000 of Indian stock in his will. In 1845 the stock held by the Trustees amounted to £4,000.

In the beginning of the 19th century, the Stratton Baptists enlarged their meeting house and a plaque inscribed "T.S.1801" (after Thomas Smith) was placed over the door. This inscription can still be seen at the base of the present vestry building where it was placed after the demolition of the earlier building.

The old building deteriorated and all except the balcony was demolished in 1934. As there was no baptistery baptisms took place in the River Cole and later in the Clay Pits in Swindon Road.

Arthur Burson, the main benefactor of the new building was born in 1861 and died in 1934 aged 54. He was born in Steventon, Berkshire. His connection with Swindon started in 1880 when he was an assistant in the grocery business of H Freeth & Son. Following the death of Mr Freeth in 1890 Arthur Burson became the sole owner of 7 shops and retired in 1926. On his retirement he presented to the town the clock over the bandstand in the town gardens.

Arthur Burson was a magistrate and held a seat on the Town Council. He was baptised in 1880 at the Baptist Church in Fleet St. and later became involved with the Baptist Tabernacle. He married Emily Solway from Somerset and had 4 daughters.

Annie was born in 1888 and died in 1974 aged 86. Elsie was born in 1892 with curvature of the spine and was never very strong. She died in 1932 aged 40. Hilda was born in 1897. She attended boarding school in Weston Super Mare, became ill there and died in 1913 aged 16. Grace was the last child born in 1902 and died in 1991 aged 89.

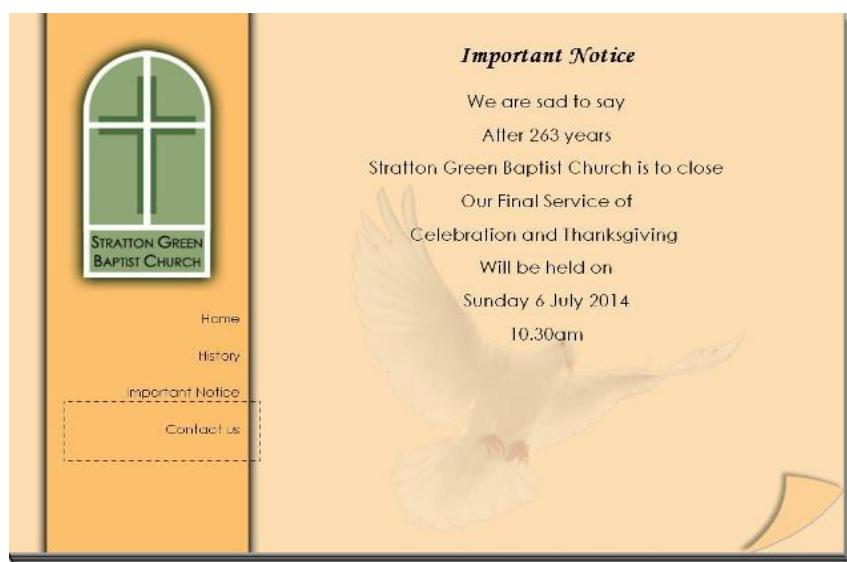
Arthur Burson left £1000 towards the building of a Baptist Church at Stratton Green in memory of his daughters Elsie and Hilda. This was opened in October 1934. The window over the pulpit was put in place in memory of the sisters. Emily Burson then gave £2000 to build a Sunday school at Stratton Green in memory of her husband. This was opened in Dec 1937.

In 1940 Pastor Bown introduced a matter of vital importance to the church – the decline in attendance at divine worship and the prayer meetings. He was concerned and was eager to discuss the matter of the spiritual life of the church. There was a long discussion whereby they might fully enter into the life intended for them as a Christian church. That discussion continues today!

The church has continued to see peaks and troughs; at one time the church was down to just one member. God has remained faithful to the people here as they have remained faithful to Him in worship and prayer. Long may this continue!

After 263 years of worship at Stratton Green the Baptist Church held its last service on 6th July 2014. A final service was held and a souvenir photograph was given to all those who attended the service and an order of service was produced which can be found on the Wiltshire OPC Parish page for Stratton St. Margaret and is published under the Stratton Green Baptist Church section under the under Non-Conformity and Other Places of Worship section.

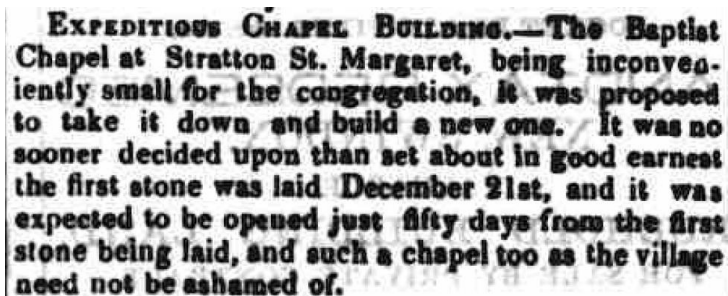
The closure was announced on the church website with the following notice:-



**Source:- Stratton Green Baptist Church Web Site**

## Additional Research

There were 4 Baptists groups recorded as far back as 1676. Local Baptists originally met in the house of John Herring, after a licence was granted in 1709 and from 1735 another thatched house was licenced specifically for Baptist worship opposite where church is now, this was eventually demolished during road widening 1936. Various preachers visited and a noted visitor in March 1743 was John Cerrick the Moravian hymnist. Caleb Bailey of Berwick Bassett left two small fields in Stratton in his will to William Lawrence, a Baptist and Glover of Swindon. This land was next to a small orchard belonging to Mrs Read. This land was acquired, and a trust was drawn up for the building "that parcel of pastureland containing 9 poles next to Horne's Close". This was built in 1750, (deed dated 11-03-1950), the first recorded preacher 1750 being Thomas Davies of Fairford and on 9th October 1751 had a meeting room formally licensed by Wiltshire Quarter Sessions, In 1788 Mr Thomas Smith became pastor helped by John Mayell who was a preacher here. John Mayell was born in 1764 and died in 1807. He was buried in Stratton Green graveyard. This building was enlarged in 1801 by Thomas Smith. 1814 Rev. Daniel White was pastor. In the 1830's there was a band lead by William Greenway(flute) with William Morse(clarinet), Jerry Walker(bass) and William Brewer Wearing (Harmonium). 1831-1865 Rev. Richard Breeze. It was licenced for marriages on 6<sup>th</sup> Feb 1844 and the first wedding was on 5<sup>th</sup> March between Rev H Williams of Painswick and Ann Reynolds of Marsh farm, Rev R Breeze carried out the ceremony.



**EXPEDITIOUS CHAPEL BUILDING.—The Baptist Chapel at Stratton St. Margaret, being inconveniently small for the congregation, it was proposed to take it down and build a new one. It was no sooner decided upon than set about in good earnest the first stone was laid December 21st, and it was expected to be opened just fifty days from the first stone being laid, and such a chapel too as the village need not be ashamed of.**

**Evening Advertiser 1 February 1858**

The small chapel was replaced in 1848/9 with a design of Sir Moreton Peto, and opened by Rev. R Breeze, this extension took seating from 225 to 530, the design included some iron-work and the galleries in the form of a horse-shoe, the baptistry being behind the pulpit all at a cost of £1,500 by Mr Thomas Barrett of Swindon. (*Swindon Advertiser 29-03-1869*), and demolished in 1934 itself being replaced by present chapel by 1935, first wedding May 1935 (*North Wilts Herald 03-05-1935*), as there were no baptistry early baptisms took place in the River Cole and later in the Clay Pits in Swindon Road. Early Baptist families - Barrett, Day, Iles, Jordan, Paintings & Williams. Behind the chapel a small schoolroom was built in 1858, this was replaced by the Burston Memorial School a Sunday school built in 1937.

-The Annual Christmas Tree was provided on Saturday last, for the Sunday school, and toys, sweets, etc., were distributed to the children. *Swindon Advertiser 02-01-1886*.

-Anniversary services have been held preacher was Rev. Baker. There were currently 57 scholars. *North Wilts Herald 04-06-1886*.

-The company of coloured singers, descendants of freed slaves, gave an evenings entertainment on Saturday evening. *North Wilts Herald 06-07-1888*.

-Harvest Thanksgiving Service on Sunday. The chapel was decorated with fruit, flowers, etc., given by friends. Morning & afternoon sermons by Rev. J W Gardner, and evening by Mr W C King of Swindon. Collection towards chapel repairs. *North Wilts Herald 27-09-1889*.

-The 144<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the chapel took place on Good Friday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1894. There was a public tea and an evening meeting which started at 6:30pm after which songs were sung to a harmonium, violin & cornet. A collection was made to the Augmentation fund. *Swindon Advertiser 31-03-1894*.

-The anniversary was celebrated on Good Friday, a good company assembled necessitating the tables being laid twice. Pastors W L Williams & F C Shellard gave the address. *Swindon Advertiser 08-04-1904*.

-Concert was given on Thursday by Miss Frances Sparkes and company on behalf of the Sunday School funds. *North Wilts Herald 06-03-1925*

-Mr. Crayford, a Swindonian, gave a lecture on his works amongst the lepers in Nigeria. Stratton Baptists are well known for their work with lepers. *North Wilts Herald 11-12-1936.*

-The Baptist & Methodist Congregations joined together on Christmas morning in the new church. Mr. B Hill lead the service. Offering would be donated to National Children's' Home & Orphans. *North Wilts Herald 30-12-1938.*

-Mr. Tom Taylor of Swindon was the preacher at the Harvest Thanksgiving, the church was tastefully decorated. *North Wilts Advertiser 19-09-1941.*

-In 1952 the Wiltshire and East Somerset Young Baptists Association held there annual meeting. *Wiltshire Times 21-06-1952.*

-The premises were taken over by **Storehouse Pentecostal Church** in July 2015. In 2020 **The Vine Church** took possession of the building.

#### Preachers & Ministers.

1870-1873 Rev John M Murphy, 1876-1879 Rev Nicholas Rogers, 1880-1891 Rev J W Gardiner, 1894 Pastor R.W.Mansfield, 1901 Pastor F C Shellard appointed. 1907-1912 Mr Frank Verrinder, George Taylor was minister from 1913-1926. 1926-1932 Mr George Crees, 1933 Mr. L Mattick, Pastor Stanley Bown was minister in 1934-1946, followed by Pastor Lander from 1949-1974, 1974-77 Douglas Noyce, 1979 saw arrival of Rev Dennis Wright. Roger Grant 1988-89, David Parsons, Tim Bush 2002-2007 and Hilary Morton who was the final minister from 2007 until it closed 6th July 2014.

For more information visit [Stratton Green Baptists](#). Pictures of the church & Memorial hall can be seen in [Stratton Green Baptist Gallery](#).

[Stratton Green Baptist Church Service Notice 1948](#)      [Stratton Green Baptist Church Closure Order of Service 6th July 2014](#)