

# Making a Splash: 150 years of Baptist witness in Winchester

winchester baptist church  
**celebrating**  
**150 years**  
Making a Splash!

a church without walls  
City Road serving clusters baptism  
**community**  
students alpha Bible youth homeless  
people seniors children worship  
vision

**Winchester Baptist Church** - the body of Christian believers which meets today in the imposing neo-classical Victorian building in City Road - was established 150 years ago, in February 1861.

This exhibition explains how and why the Church began, what makes Baptists different from other Christian denominations, and how the members of the Church today are actively involved in the life and work of the City.

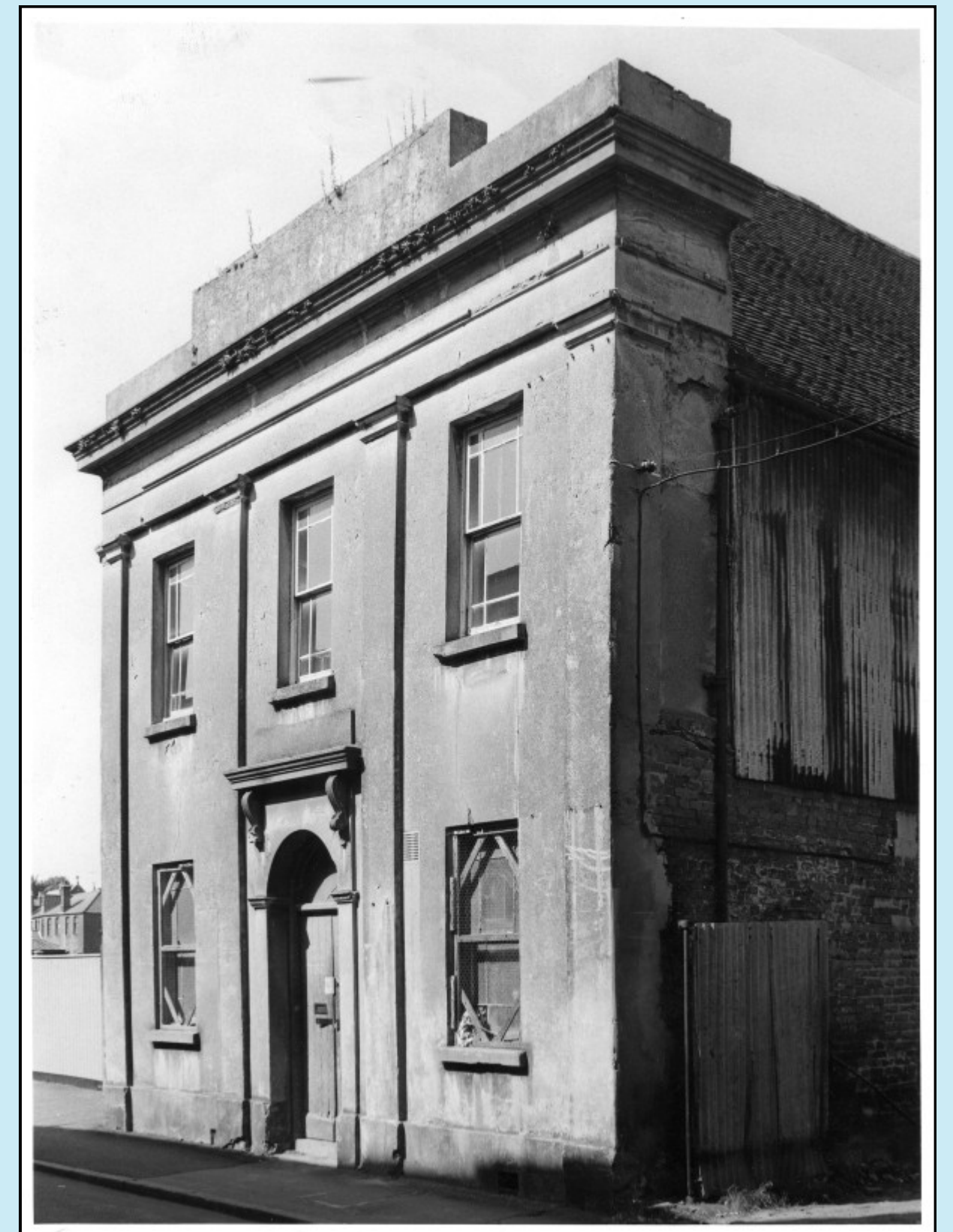
It is believed that there was a Baptist Church in Winchester in the 17th Century, for it is known that Richard Kent, one of the earliest English Baptists, once lived here. However, no records can be found to confirm its existence.

The first group about which anything is known is that of the Strict Baptists, who first worshipped in 1813 in a Mission Hall, previously used by the Methodists, in Silver Hill.

This group was dissolved in 1820 but in August 1822 another Baptist Church consisting of twelve members was formed. With the assistance of the Hampshire Baptist Itinerant Society they purchased the Silver Hill Mission Hall in 1825. However, the Church experienced many ups and downs and was eventually dissolved in 1855. A few believers continued to meet there intermittently until 1884.

Between 1907 and 1941 City Road Baptist Church (the body of believers now known as Winchester Baptist Church) took over the Mission Hall, restored it and held meetings there.

The Mission Hall was requisitioned by the Fire Brigade during the Second World War for essential Air Raid Precautions work. Between 1945 and 1948 it was rented by the Ministry of Supply and it was then used as a store by Dicks electrical contractors until it was demolished in the late 1960s to make way for the King's Walk Shopping Centre.



**Silver Hill Mission Hall in the late '60s**

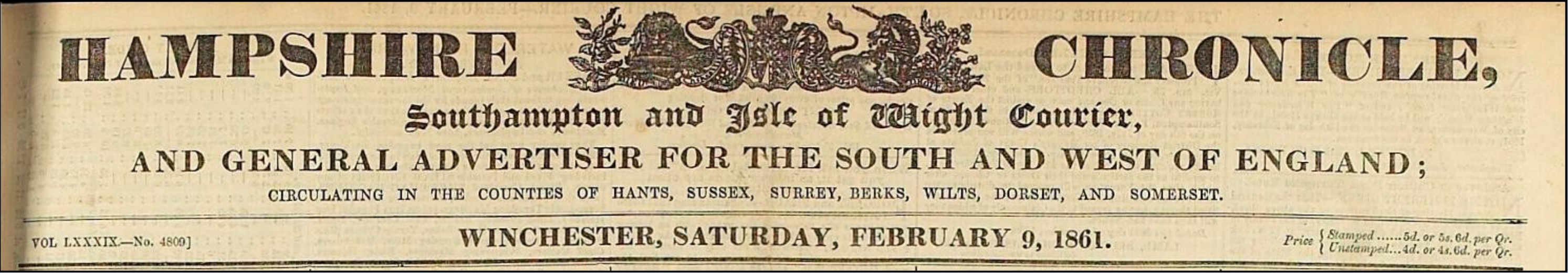
Photograph by Bob Sollars, reproduced by permission of Winchester City Council Museums: PWCM 8987



**Silver Hill in the 1950s, looking west** The Mission Hall is on the left hand edge of the photo  
Photograph reproduced by permission of Winchester City Council: Hampshire County Record Office: W/C5/10/13/16/2

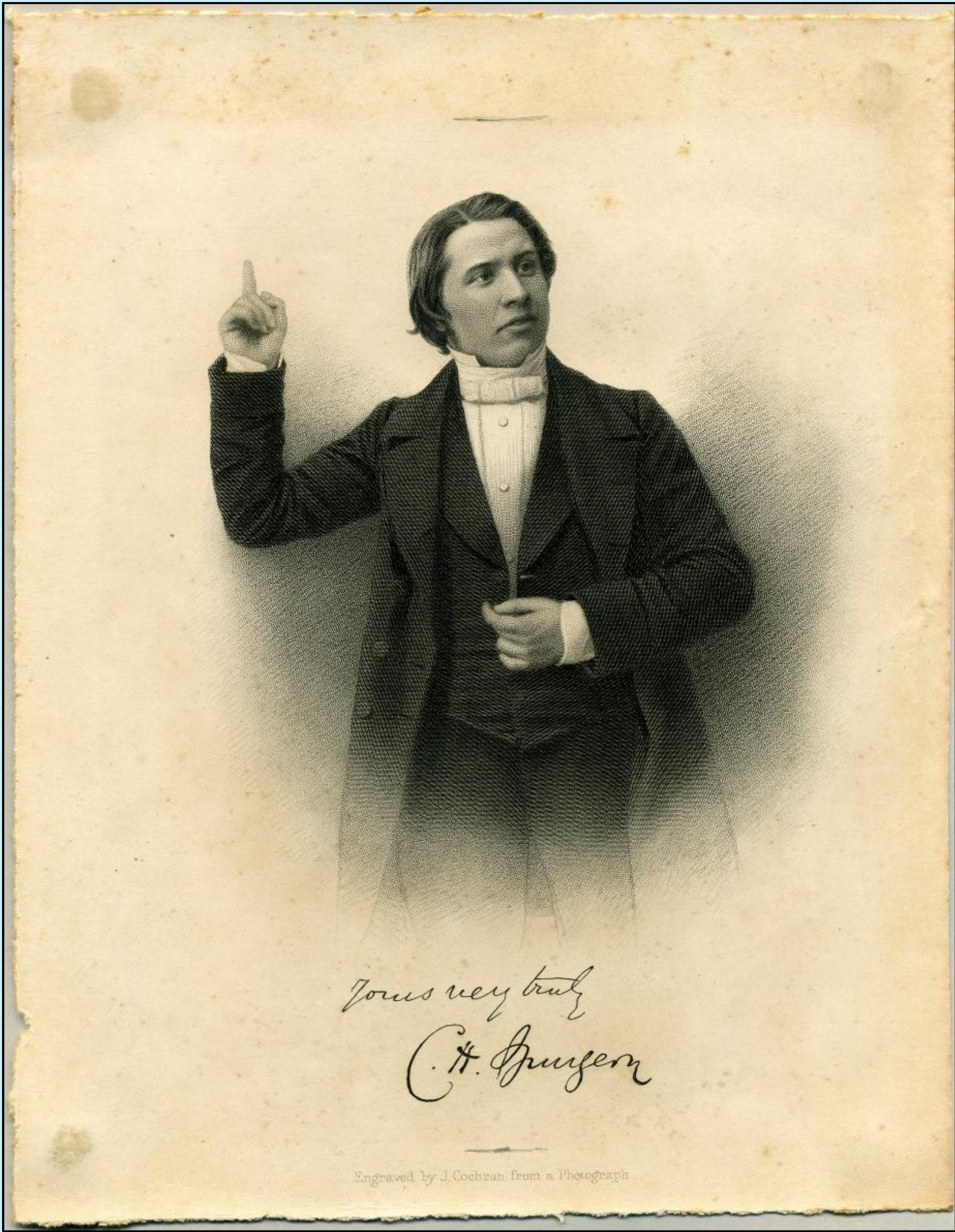


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Mr. SPURGEON'S VISIT.—On Wednesday the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon, the well-known Minister, of London, preached at St. John's House, in this city. In the afternoon, long before the time announced for opening, a great number of persons were waiting for admission, and the large assembly room was quickly filled, it being calculated that, including those in the side-rooms, at least 700 persons were present. The rev. gentleman, on his arrival, exactly at half-past two o'clock, opened the service with a short prayer; and, after singing and scripture reading, and a more lengthened prayer, he delivered a very fluent and practical discourse, taking for his text the latter portion of the 12th verse in the 5th chapter of the 1st Epistle of St. Peter. In the evening there was an increased assembly, and before seven o'clock there could not have been less than 800 people in the large room, and including those in the ante-rooms, the whole must have numbered quite 1000; and the crowd still outside rendered it necessary to have the gates closed. The rev. gentleman on this occasion preached from the 1st chapter Ephesians, part of the 13th and 14th verses, and again delivered a most impressive and earnest discourse, which was listened to with marked attention, and no doubt to the benefit of many. To those who went to be amused, anticipating perhaps some of those absurd, ridiculous, and untrue sayings for which Mr. Spurgeon has wrongly been given credit, we are informed that this occasion must have been a disappointment; and that the majority must give him credit for dealing with great truths in an uncommon way, and applying to all the simple Gospel of Christ in a manner at once earnest, stirring, and impressive, and which many will never forget. The congregation included those of all denominations, both lay and clerical, though it was principally formed of dissenters. It is extraordinary that from such large congregations the collections were so small; the money was found to consist chiefly of the smallest coin, and both collections realised the sum of £27 15s 11d only, a friend—a stranger to the city—adding a sovereign, making the total £28 15s 11d. Had the necessary expenses, which were incurred by one gentleman, been deducted, we are informed that Mr. Spurgeon would have left the city with but a very unfavourable impression of the liberality of its people—at least towards the object the rev. gentleman came to benefit. In connection with the new Tabernacle in London, it is intended to hold a bazaar about the 19th March next, for the purpose of raising the remaining amount necessary for completing the building; and some of his friends here are desirous of testifying their esteem for Mr. Spurgeon's labours by sending contributions in support of the said object.

Photographs of Hampshire Chronicle reproduced by permission of Hampshire Record Office: 3A00W/A1/35



By the age of 19 Spurgeon was Minister of the largest Baptist congregation in London, New Park Street Chapel. He soon became the most popular preacher of the day. In 1857 23,654 listened to him at the Crystal Palace on the day of national humiliation after the Indian Mutiny. It is said that in his lifetime he preached to around 10 million people.

His visit to Winchester was just a month before his London congregation moved into their newly-constructed church building, the Metropolitan Tabernacle, which had seats for 5,000 and standing room for a further 1,000.

On Wednesday 6th February 1861 the 26 year old Rev. Charles Haddon Spurgeon came to Winchester at the invitation of a few local Baptists to preach at St. John's Rooms in the Broadway.

There were two meetings, one in the afternoon and one in the evening. Long before each one, people were waiting for admission. The large assembly room was quickly filled on both occasions, and there were soon overflows into the side rooms: a total of over 700 in the afternoon and more than 1000 in the evening. So great was the crowd outside the evening meeting that the doors had to be closed.

Those who went to scoff at the great preacher were disappointed. The *Hampshire Chronicle* reported that he “dealt with great truths in an uncommon way, and applied to all the simple Gospel of Truth in a manner at once earnest, stirring and impressive, and which many will never forget”.

The results of Spurgeon's stirring sermons were immediate. On the following Sunday, 10th February 1861, a group of Baptists met in the small room of the Corn Exchange (now the Discovery Centre) in Jewry Street.

That was the first gathering of the Church - the group of Christians - who came to be known as City Road Baptist Church and are now known simply as Winchester Baptist Church.

Signed engraving of Spurgeon, dating from his visit to Winchester, and Admission Ticket to the evening meeting  
Winchester Baptist Church archives



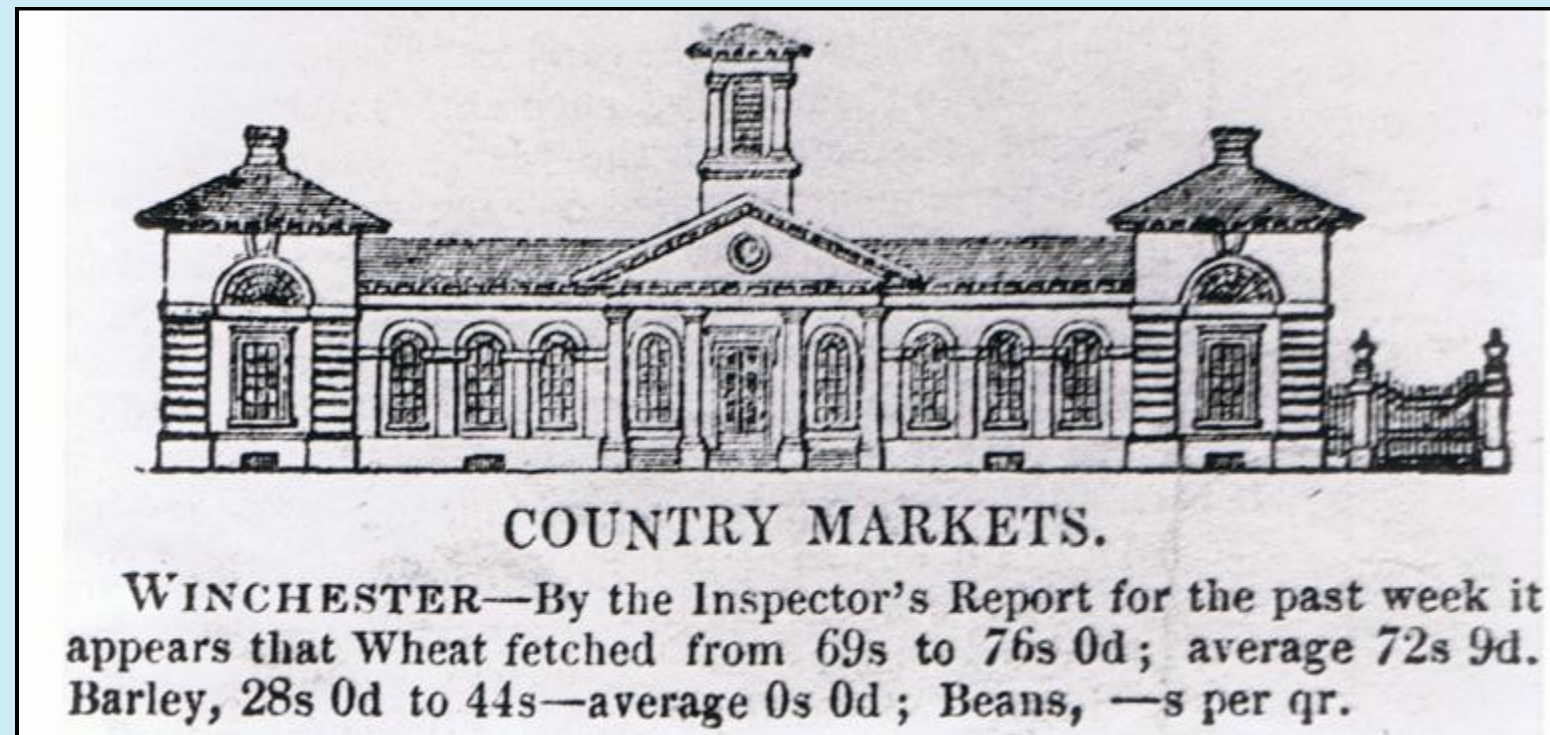
A meeting in St. John's Rooms in the mid-19th century

Picture reproduced by permission of Winchester City Council Museums: A.457





# Making a Splash: 150 years of Baptist witness in Winchester



**A 19th Century handbill showing the Corn Exchange**  
Reproduced by permission of the City of Winchester Trust

We know the names of only four of those who met that Sunday in the Corn Exchange in February 1861:

Samuel Beaven of St. Cross Farm  
John Heath of Eastgate Street  
Joseph Marks  
H M Leslie

Every Saturday afternoon Mr Leslie would go to the Corn Exchange, sweep the room, put down matting, dust and arrange the chairs. On Sunday mornings he would help to seat the people, start the tunes and be host to the preacher. We are told that every meeting saw the room full.

They soon decided that a permanent home was necessary. Just a short distance from the Corn Exchange a site was found in Northgate Street (now City Road) and plans for a new building were made.

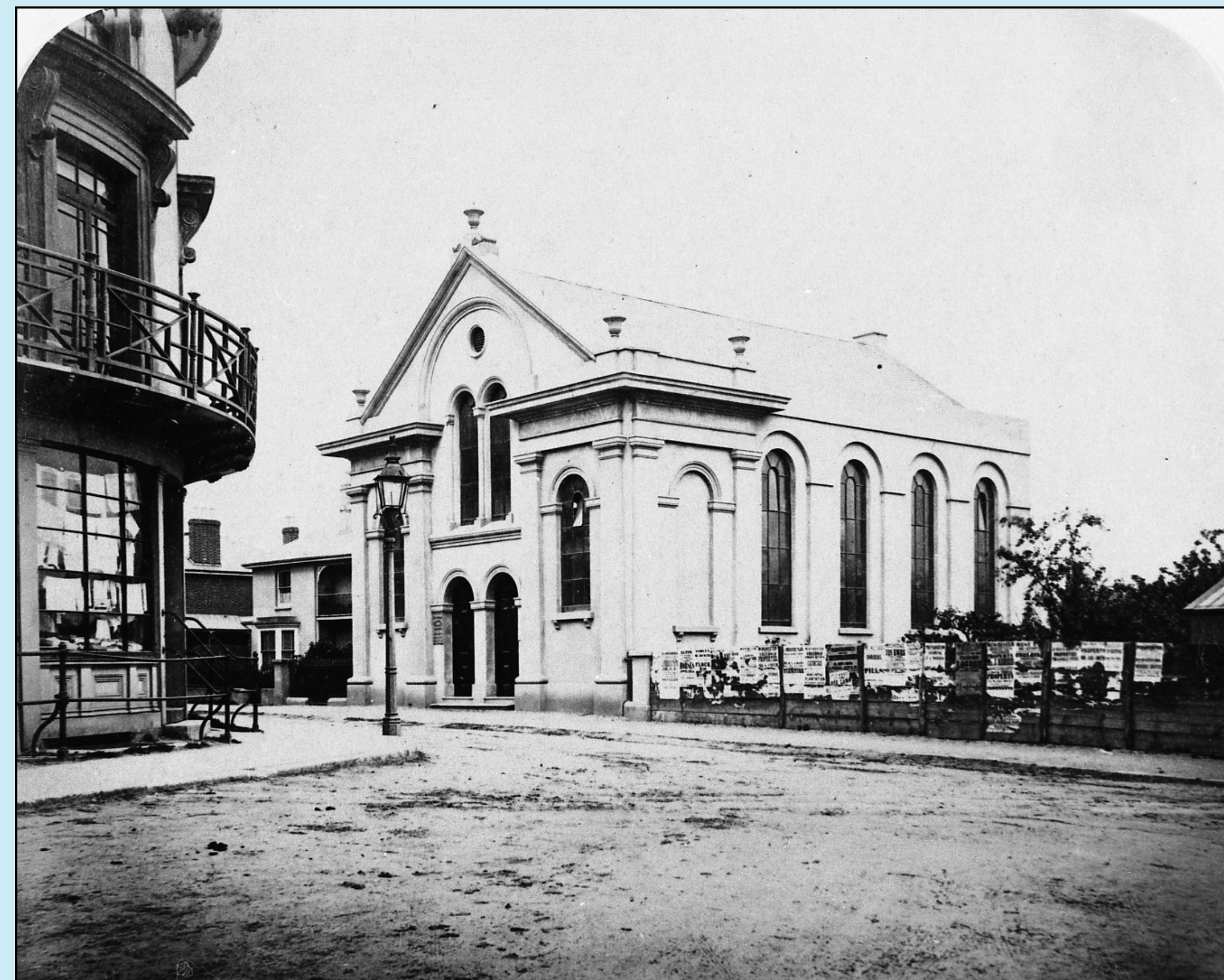


**The Corn Exchange around 1900**  
Photograph from the Hawkins Collection, reproduced by permission of the City of Winchester Trust

The piece of land on which the Church's building was to be constructed was handed over in July 1864 to the nine Trustees:

Thomas Henry Coles of Middle Brook Street, painter  
George Bragg of West End Terrace, civil engineer  
William Frederick Gifford of Abbey Mills, miller  
John Greenfield of 68 High Street, draper  
Frederick Otway of Great Minster Street, milliner  
Sydney Perren of Parchment Street, timber merchant  
John Heath of Eastgate Street, gentleman  
Edward Soul of High Street, grocer  
Elijah Hibberd of Jewry Street, umbrella maker

The building was to be used as *"a place of public worship by the Society of Protestant Dissenters, called Particular or Calvinistic Baptists"* and authority was given to begin a Sunday School provided that this did *"not interfere with the public worship of Almighty God"*.



**The City Road building circa 1870**  
Photograph by William Savage, reproduced by permission of Winchester City Council Museums: PWCM 2650

A Mr Briggs of the Royal Engineers completed the design for the building, an adaptation of the Doric and Tuscan orders, faced with Portland Stone. The contractor was Mr H Macklin of St. John's Street.

The building was opened for public worship on 4th April 1865. By that date over £700 had been raised towards the total cost, which came to about £1,200. It was to be ten years before that amount was finally cleared.



**The City Road building today**  
Photograph courtesy of Barry Mann Photography

The members at the Silver Hill Mission Hall in the 19th century were known as 'Strict' Baptists; those who met at the Corn Exchange were 'Particular' Baptists - both exclusive groupings. The members of the Church today are 'General' Baptists who believe that when Jesus died on the cross He did so for everyone, not just for the 'elect' or a 'particular' group of people.



# Making a Splash: 150 years of Baptist witness in Winchester

## What is a Baptist?

Why did those founders of Winchester Baptist Church in 1861 think that it was so important to establish a new, Baptist, Church? Why didn't they want to be part of one of the other denominations, all of which were well-established in the city at that time? What is it that makes Baptists distinctive?

Most people probably think of believers' baptism as the primary belief which distinguishes Baptists from other Christians. But Baptists are not the only Christians to practice believers' baptism. Nor are any of their other key beliefs unique to them. It is the combination of these various beliefs which distinguish Baptists from other Christian denominations. So what are they? They are summarised on this display panel and panel 5.

## Baptism is for believers only

Baptism is a sign of joining ourselves to Jesus Christ and his Church - a very visible public declaration of personal faith. If the Church is made up only of freely believing disciples of Jesus then, Baptists believe, on the basis of the New Testament, baptism is for believers only.

As a sign of that personal commitment Baptists practise baptism by full immersion. This rite symbolises both the washing away of their sins through Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and, in being submerged and then rising from the water, the believer's desire to 'die to self' and live for Jesus Christ. This new life is made effective by the power of the Holy Spirit living in the individual.

## The Church is a gathered company of believers

The Church is not a building; and it's not people who happen to live in a Christian country. You can't be born into it by virtue of your parents' faith. It's a community of followers of Jesus - people who make "Jesus is Lord" their personal, conscious confession of faith and seek to make Him Lord of every aspect of their lives - gathered together for worship, witness and service. For Baptists, the Church is not just an 'optional extra' to being a Christian: belonging together with like-minded believers is part of the package. You can't be a Christian in isolation.

Central to Baptist worship is prayer, praise and listening to God's word through Bible reading and preaching. Communion - sometimes called 'the Lord's Supper' - is celebrated regularly: from the Communion table a loaf of bread is broken and shared amongst the congregation and alcohol-free wine is distributed in small glasses. The Communion table is not considered to be an altar because the sacrifice of Jesus was made once and for all.



Photographs courtesy of Barry Mann Photography



Photographs courtesy of Ed Jackson



Photographs courtesy of Ron Sweetenham



Age and infirmity are no barrier to baptism: Frances was in her eighties when she made her public profession of faith.

Instead of infant baptism, Baptists mark the birth of a baby with a Service of Thanksgiving and Dedication, where the parents, supported by the whole Church, dedicate themselves to bringing up the child in accordance with Christian values.





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## The emphasis is on the local Church

There is no hierarchy of bishops or councils exercising authority over the members of a Baptist Church and telling them what they must do, how to worship and who they can have as their Minister. Each local Baptist Church is independent and self-supporting and appoints its own Minister(s) - sometimes known as 'Pastors' - to have particular responsibility for preaching, teaching and pastoral care. Working alongside them are also elected Elders (individuals charged especially with a role of spiritual oversight) and Deacons (those with more administrative and practical responsibilities) who, together with the Minister(s), form the Church's leadership team.

But the final authority rests not with the Ministers, Elders or Deacons but with the Church's members gathered together periodically in Church Meetings. It is the Church Meeting which, for example, appoints leaders, agrees financial policy and determines mission strategy.

Becoming a member is an important act of commitment to the local Baptist Church. It is a formal step open to any Christian who wants to play a full role in the life and work of the Church.

Winchester Baptist Church currently has just over 170 members, drawn from about an eight mile radius of the city.



**The Church Meeting in action**

Photograph courtesy of Barry Mann Photography

## A 'priesthood of all believers'

Baptists do not have priests. Rather, they believe in the 'priesthood of all believers' - that all Christians are equal before God and all are equally called to serve God in the local church and in the wider world.

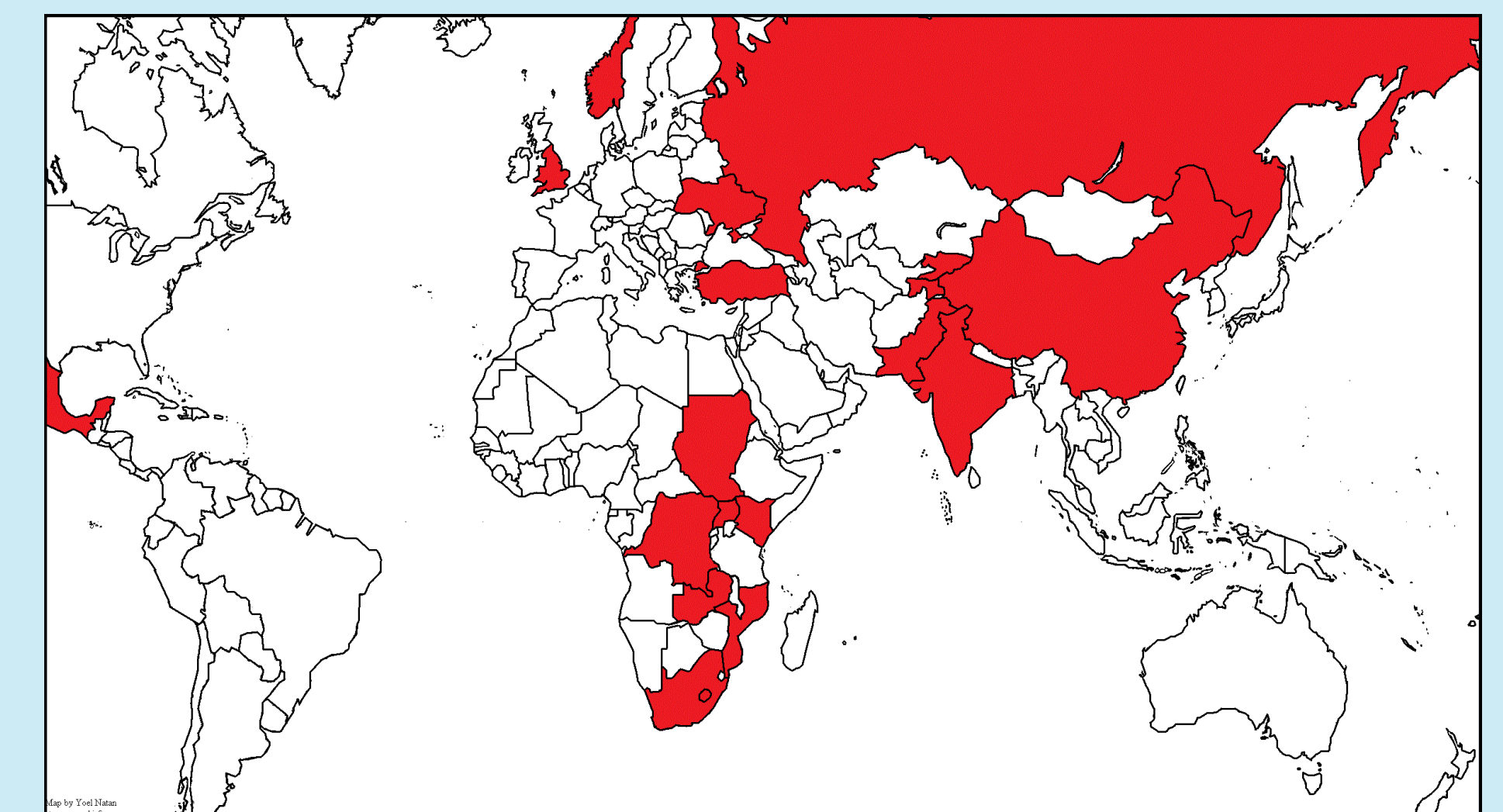
Though God calls some people to leadership in the Church, Baptists believe that by their baptism every Christian is commissioned to share in the work of God. All Christians are 'gifted' by God in particular ways and they minister to one another using those gifts - of teaching, faith-sharing, social action, pastoral care, serving, prophetic insight, praying, healing, administration and hospitality.

## We are all missionaries

The Church isn't an end in itself but part of God's mission to the world. So in one sense all members of the local Church are missionaries - spreading the good news (*'gospel'*) about Jesus not just in words but also through the actions which follow from faith: healing the sick, housing the homeless, feeding the hungry, peace making and much else. For Baptists, social action and evangelisation are one in God's mission.

We take this missionary task very seriously at Winchester Baptist Church. We like to think of ourselves as 'a Church without walls', with no barriers to people joining us or to our engagement with the wider world.

You can read more about our involvement in the city on display panels 7, 8 and 9. The map on this panel shows the countries in the world where members of the Church's congregation have been during the past two years to support Christian workers or to take part in evangelistic or practical projects.



## Freedom of belief

Some of the earliest calls for religious liberty in this country and overseas were made by Baptists. We believe fundamentally in religious freedom for all, to believe or not to believe. Each one of us is responsible before God and no other person should try to take that freedom away. So we respect other people's religious views.



## The Bible is our guide in matters of belief and behaviour

Baptists believe that the Bible is the word of God and that He still speaks to His people through modern translations of these ancient texts. They shows us God's way for living, and that's why we believe and act like we do. Not that we slavishly take every single word literally - the Bible is a collection of books which are written in different styles of literature, and it needs to be understood in that way. We look to the Holy Spirit to bring the truth to light and enable us to understand that Jesus is the full revelation of God.

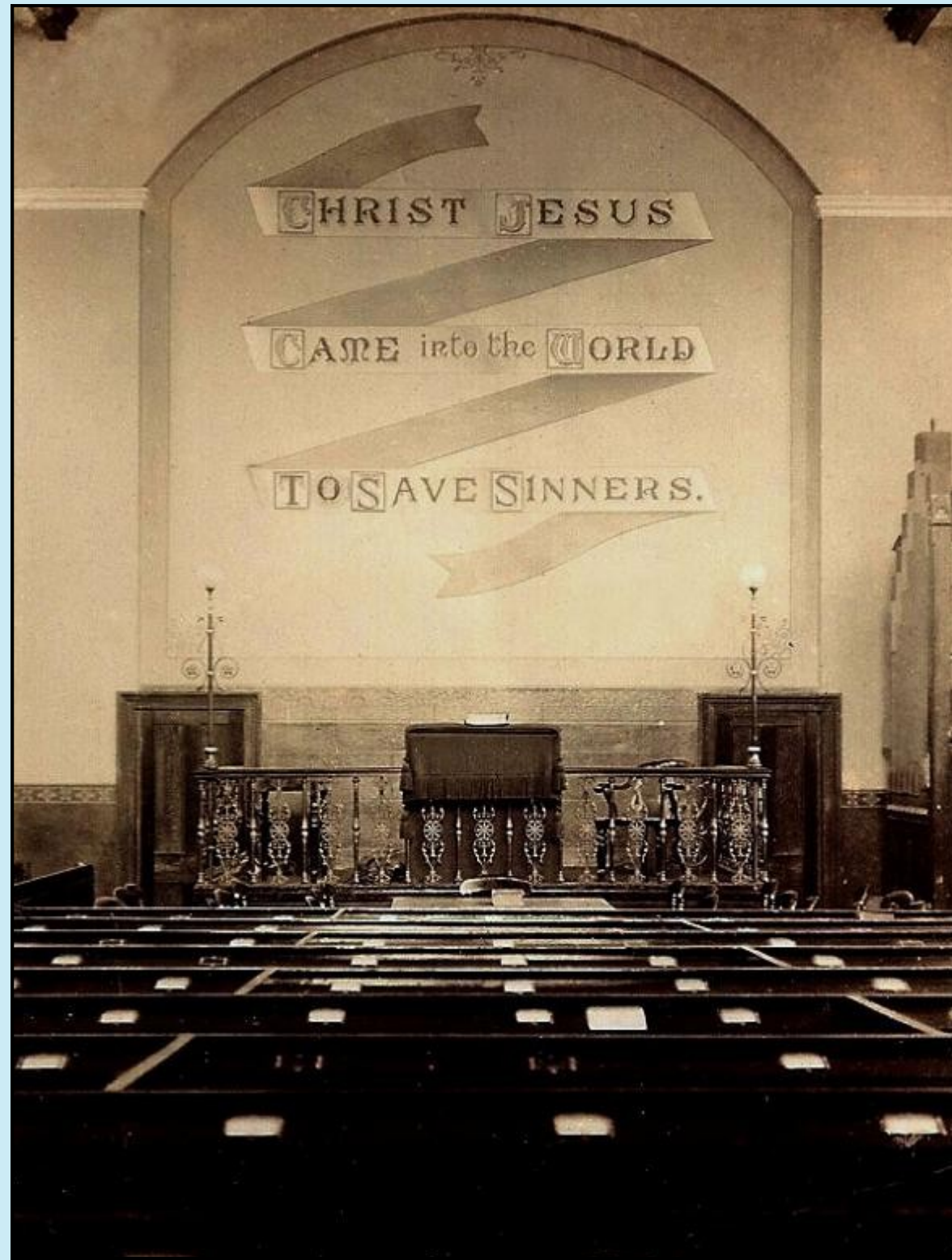
Having said all this, we at Winchester Baptist Church today are not strongly denominational and we draw our membership from all denominational backgrounds.

Though we firmly believe in the importance of believers' baptism, we don't insist that people go through baptism by immersion if they want to worship with us, take Communion with us or become a formal member of the Church. But we continue to challenge those who worship with us to consider seriously if baptism is the right next step for them in their Christian faith.



# Making a Splash: 150 years of Baptist witness in Winchester

Throughout its 150 years Winchester Baptist Church has continued to change. Its members have engaged in different forms of activity to serve the local community, and the buildings in City Road have regularly been adapted to meet new requirements. Little is now left of the original Victorian structure apart from the outer shell.



**The interior of the church sanctuary around 1900**

Photograph reproduced by permission of Derek Stratton

1926 saw a complete renovation of the church building, including the construction of a choir gallery and the replacement of the Victorian windows by leaded lights of pink-tinted hammered glass. The £1,762 bill took 17 years to pay off.



**The interior of the church sanctuary in 1926**

Photograph reproduced by permission of David Fry:  
Winchester City Council Museums: PWCM 29534

In 1887 a corrugated iron lean-to School Room was erected on the west side of the City Road building - a structure not replaced until the present entrance porch, toilets, kitchen and meeting room were constructed in 1978.

It was in 1914 that the words 'BAPTIST CHURCH' were placed in 15" high letters on the front of the building. Electric lighting was installed in 1918.

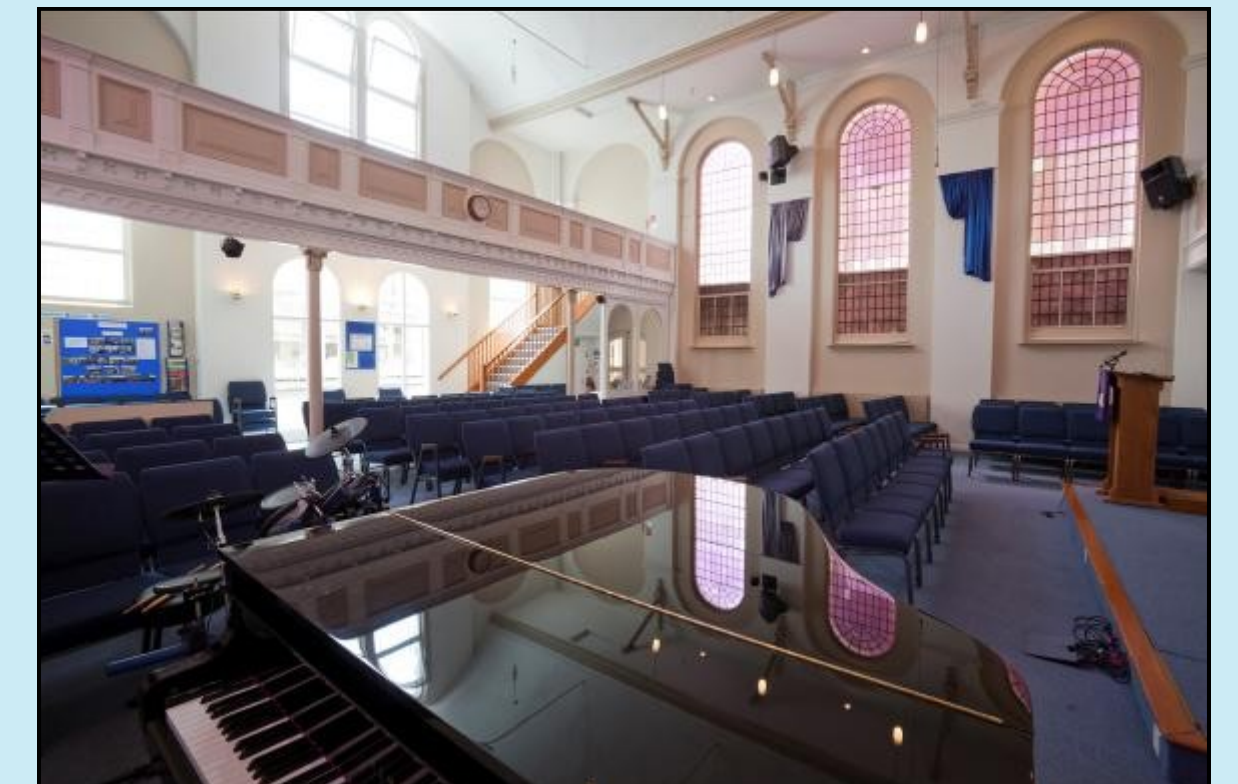


**Rev. Joseph Tweedley lays the foundation stone of the church hall in 1959**

Photograph reproduced by permission of Derek Stratton

In 1959 a long-standing ambition was fulfilled - the construction of a purpose-built hall in Swan Lane, to the rear of the City Road church building, on land originally purchased for that purpose in 1902. The adjoining Swan Lane cottages, also owned by the Church, were sold in 1960 to pay for the redecoration of the church building.

In 1991 parts of the hall site were redeveloped to create additional meeting rooms and offices, a modern kitchen and toilets and more easily accessible facilities for the disabled.



**The interior of the church sanctuary today**

Photographs courtesy of Barry Mann Photography

Finally, in 1978, the entrance doors which opened onto the narrow pavement were replaced by windows so that passers-by could see worship services taking place, a new main entrance was constructed at the side, the raked floor of the church sanctuary was levelled, the pews were replaced by chairs and a new, sunken, baptistry was installed with proper drainage, not just a soakaway into the old City Ditch.



**The church hall in 1959**

Photograph reproduced by permission of Derek Stratton



**The church hall today**

Photograph courtesy of Barry Mann Photography



# Making a Splash: 150 years of Baptist witness in Winchester

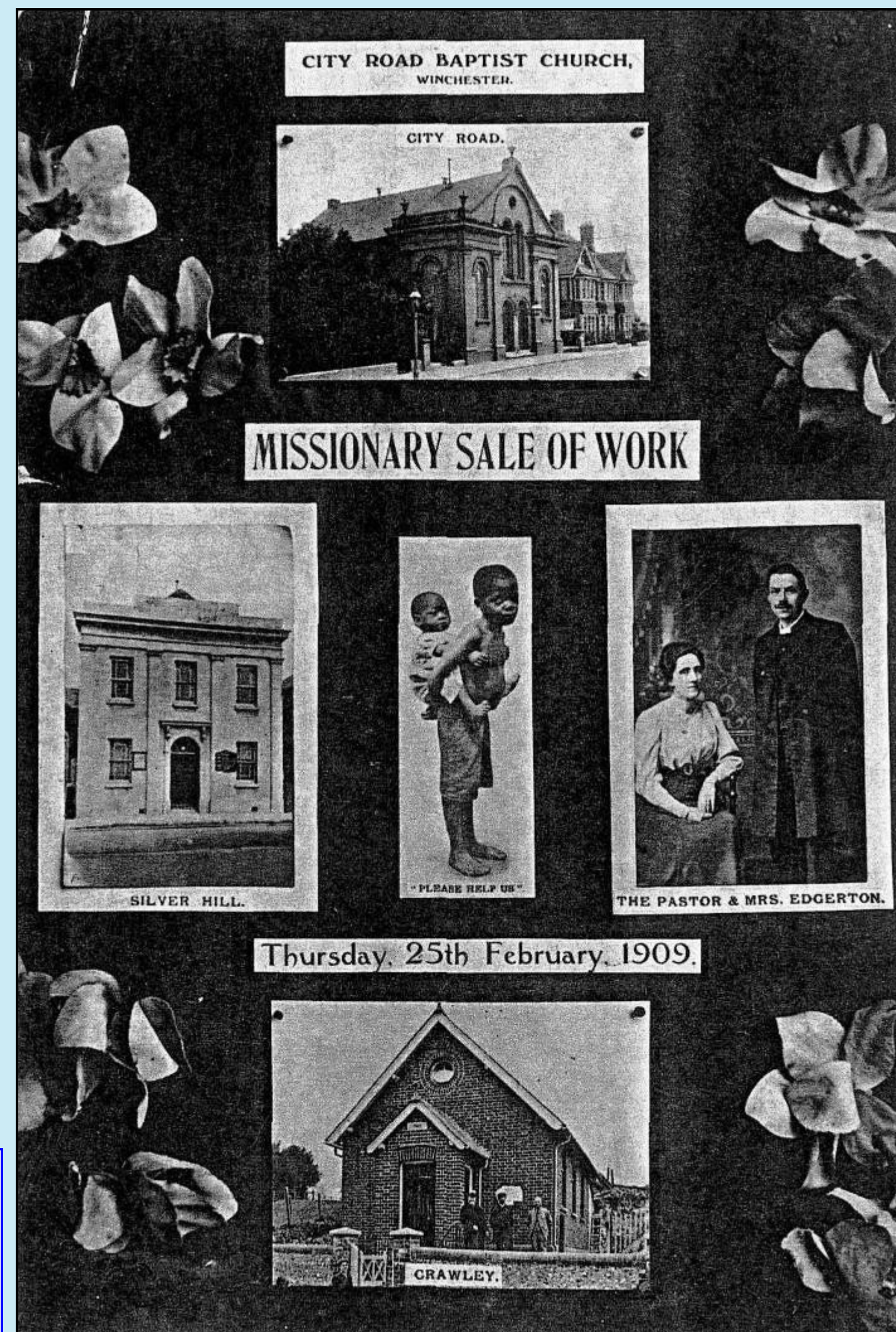
Some of the earliest recorded activities of the new Baptist community at City Road in the 1860s were things which are still very important in the life of the Church today:

- providing activities and teaching for children and young people
- sharing their faith with the local community
- supporting missionary work overseas.

A Sunday School and Scholars' Library were quickly established in the new Church. One highlight for the children was the annual summer outing, usually to Avington Park, travelling in tradesmen's vans for a picnic tea and a 'Panorama' show. In 1873 the behaviour of the boys was a cause for concern and the remedy suggested was to have a larger staff of male teachers.

In 1889 a Young People's Christian Endeavour group was formed. Uniformed organisations followed in the 20th century: the Girl's Life Brigade in the 1930s, the Life Boys in 1941 and the Boy's Brigade in 1946, but all were disbanded by the 1970s.

The Church today still gives priority to children's and youth work, with paid specialist Children's and Youth Workers. As well as Sunday morning activities there is a separate mid-week youth congregation ('The Edge'), a thriving weekly pre-school play group ('Friday Fun') and a youth club for teenagers ('Friday Club').



Winchester Baptist Church archives

The first recorded meeting organised by the Church to raise support for the Baptist Missionary Society was in October 1861.

Today, the Church still has close links with what is now BMS World Mission, and in particular with a Christian worker in Afghanistan. In addition it provides significant financial and practical support for three missionary families in Lesotho, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Middle East. As the map on display panel 5 shows, individual members of the Church are also involved in a wide variety of overseas projects.



The Boy's Brigade in the late 1940s Photograph courtesy of Paul Tipple

In 1889 the Church rented a house in Water Lane to use as a Mission Hall and also established a Dorcas Society and a Tract Society. 1890 saw the creation of a Band of Hope group and an evangelistic musical band for open air meetings.

From 1895 services were held weekly in Crawley village, first in a barn and then, between 1901 and 1926, in a purpose-built chapel. The Silver Hill Mission Hall was revived in 1907 (see display panel 1).

More recently, in 1991, the Church planted an offshoot in Harestock, now known as North Winchester Community Church.

Today, the Church periodically runs Alpha Courses for people interested in discovering more about Christianity.



Christingle Service in 1990 Photograph courtesy of Janet Sparkes



Children's activities Photograph courtesy of Barry Mann Photography



# Making a Splash: 150 years of Baptist witness in Winchester

The Church has always tried to respond positively to the current needs of the city.

Upon the outbreak of the First World War it opened up its schoolroom as a Soldiers' Institute. In the first four months over 2,000 soldiers took advantage of the facilities provided: a canteen, opportunities for letter writing and reading newspapers and magazines, and sing-songs round the piano. The Institute continued in operation until the signing of the peace in 1919.

When war broke out again in 1939, the City Road church building was the only one in the city to be opened immediately for worship. The schoolroom became a Rest Centre for the duration of the war.

Today, the Church seeks to respond to current issues like the ageing population and increasing levels of personal debt.

Several members of the congregation who have completed a training course with the organisation 'Christians Against Poverty' run courses in money management. These courses are open to all members of the public as well as to the Church. The participants have spoken highly of the course and commented on its simplicity and its effectiveness in helping them to manage their money better.



Christmas Service at Victoria House

Just as the church buildings have continued to be adapted to meet changing requirements, so forms of worship have also changed with the times. The current contemporary style is one reason why the Church remains attractive to young families and the church building is full every Sunday morning.



Holiday at Home  
'A Right Royal Garden Party'



Sunday worship  
Photographs courtesy of Barry Mann Photography

The Church's mission to the elderly is an important aspect of its work in the local community, providing practical, social, emotional and spiritual support in the later years of life. A married couple are employed to lead this initiative, supported by about 20 volunteers. They work closely with Age UK and two sheltered homes in the locality and have regular contact with about 80 individuals. They provide a monthly 'Silver Service' for worship and teaching and on other weeks a seekers' group meets for further fellowship.

For those who are in sheltered housing, a small team visits and holds services in the communal lounges of the homes.

Each summer, the mission to seniors provides two summer-time 'holiday at home' days - an opportunity for those who are not able to get away any longer to enjoy a day of fun and laughter.



'Silver Service'



All photographs of seniors courtesy of Ron Sweetenham

The Church runs a number of small groups for the growth of faith, discipleship and fellowship in the homes of some of its members. Some of these groups focus on the personal mission of members and are known as 'Clusters'. They aim to bring the love of Jesus to different communities within the city based on common need, social interest, geography or stage of life. Examples include the retired, young families, students, and residents in Kings Worthy.





# Making a Splash: 150 years of Baptist witness in Winchester

Members of the Church participate actively and enthusiastically in a broad range of activities with other Christians in Winchester. They were involved in the establishment of various initiatives to help the disadvantaged, including the Winchester Churches Night Shelter and the Winchester Churches Housing Group, and in the provision of counselling services through 'The Olive Branch'. Members continue to work in these and other projects such as the Winchester Churches Family Project and Winchester YMCA, and the Church also supports these activities financially.

A number of members are involved, with Christians from other churches, in 'Healing on the Streets', a regular point of involvement with the community. A group of them spends 1½ hours in Winchester High Street each Saturday offering to pray for people with any kinds of needs. Over 300 people were prayed for over the course of last year. Many reported feeling helped, with a deep peace after prayer, and about ten came back later to say that their situations had markedly improved.

Members of the Church are also heavily involved in the new 'Street Pastors' initiative in Winchester. This ecumenical project, which started on 18th June 2011 embracing 14 Winchester churches, responds practically to the problems of crime, violence and anti-social behaviour in the city centre by engaging with young people on the streets on Friday and Saturday nights.



**'The Feast' 2006**  
Photograph courtesy of Ed Jackson

The Church has played a leading role in the organisation of a number of major public events in Winchester in the past few years, including 'The Feast' (a time of free family entertainment at North Walls Park) in 2005 and 2006, 'The Winchester Passion' (a Passion Play which moved through the streets of the city centre at Easter 2008) and the series of 'Just 10' talks in the Cathedral in 2009.



**'The Winchester Passion'**  
Photograph copyright BBC Hampshire, used by permission



**Some of the members of Winchester Baptist Church at their Church Weekend in 2011 - a time of relaxation and teaching at a country hotel**  
Photograph courtesy of Barry Mann Photography

The Church premises are made available throughout the week to a variety of outside organisations. These include an Age UK lunch club which caters for 40 older people over two days each week; various training organisations; and a number of music, theatre, dance, choral and operatic groups who use the rooms for auditions, rehearsals, workshops and recitals.

*We are indebted to the late Cyril Cooper for his exhaustive research into the history of the Church for the booklet which he wrote to mark its centenary celebrations in 1961, and on which this display draws heavily.*

The church buildings will be open to the public under the national Heritage Open Days scheme on **Saturday 10th September 2011** between 9:00am and 5:00pm, and on **Sunday 11th September** from 2:00 to 5:00pm. The baptistry will be open to view and members of the Church will be on hand to give tours of the premises.

You can find out more about Winchester Baptist Church and its activities at our website:  
**[www.winbap.org.uk](http://www.winbap.org.uk)**

Our Sunday services are at 10:00am. and 6:30pm. You are very welcome to join us.

## Senior Ministers of the Church during the past 150 years

Winchester Baptist Church archives

Rev. T M Thorpe 1864 - 1867	Rev. H H Bourn 1867 - 1868	Rev. Dr. Willis 1868 - 1870	Rev. A Braine 1871 - 1876	Rev. A Jenkins 1876 - 1877	Rev. E Gough 1877 - 1880	Rev. W Stokes 1880 - 1883	Rev. J P Bruce 1883 - 1886	Rev. J E Roberts 1886 - 1888	Rev. W J Harris 1889 - 1892	Rev. A W Wood 1893 - 1907	Rev. A G Edgerton 1908 - 1917	Rev. E W Tarbox 1917 - 1918	Rev. W A Edwards 1919 - 1922	Rev. F H Taylor 1923 - 1931	Rev. Joseph Tweedley 1932 - 1967	Rev. John Stroud 1969 - 1976	Rev. Peter Mitson 1978 - 1986	Rev. Paul Hills 1987 - 1998	Rev. Ewen Huffman 1998 -