

OLD BRENTFORD BAPTIST MEETING

A short History of
The Strict Baptist Church
worshipping in North Road,
Brentford, from its
foundation 1819



Written and illustrated by Lewis Lupton

"I ONCE reminded him that when Dr. Adam Smith was expatiating on the beauty of Glasgow, he had cut him short by saying, 'Pray, Sir, have you ever seen Brentford?'"

Boswell's Life of Dr. Johnson.

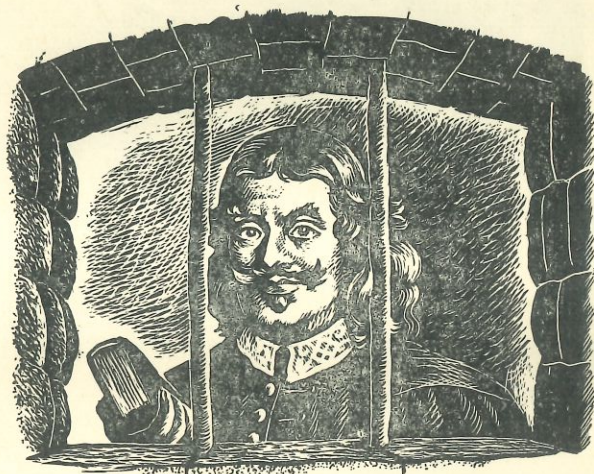
Published on behalf of the Church :

DAVID C. MANN
E. E. ROSE
C. W. T. LEAKE
H. A. BALDOCK
WALTER STOKES
JESSE STANNARD
L. F. LUPTON

Pastor
Secretary

} Deacons

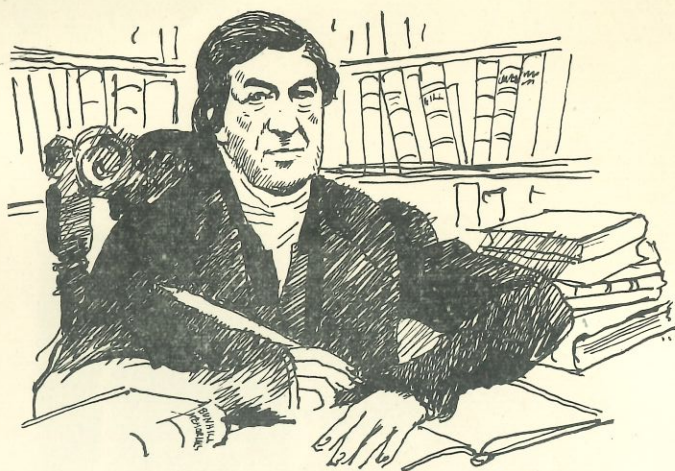
BRENTFORD, 1954



INTRODUCTION

WE cannot do better than begin our story by a quotation from an early deacon :

"The original meeting house for Dissenters in Old Brentford was in a back alley called Tray Town. It afforded a retreat in times of persecution. There Bunyan preached on his annual visits to London. In later days the pulpit was occupied by Huntington and other men of truth. Here those worshipped who afterwards established the Baptist Church in the market place, New Brentford. Suggestions were made by some to open another chapel in Old Brentford. They soon heard of a place which was opened on January 31st, 1819, and a church of the Particular Baptist denomination was formed with ten members on June 7th. Mr. David Jones of Hereford, was chosen as pastor, but a very short time proved that instead of preaching a free grace gospel he enforced certain conditions as necessary to merit salvation. After this we continued for more than five years entreating the Lord for a pastor."



FOUNDATIONS

A STURDY middle-aged figure dressed in threadbare black plodded towards London. He walked because he could not afford to ride. John Andrew Jones was minister to a few poor people in Southampton. He had fought a losing battle against poverty and was compelled to leave his wife and family to seek for additional support. As he neared the city, an old woman begged from him his last sixpence. A few hundred yards further on he was greeted by a friend who pressed a guinea into his hand. He was by trade a book-binder. A love of books, especially theological books, remained a passion with him for life. The "New Birth" came to him as a young man by means of his friend, George Comb, an heraldic painter, who asked him to attend a meeting. "I entered," says Jones, "a poor, thoughtless, careless, prayerless sinner." But this he no longer remained. Solemn convictions were succeeded a few months later by joy and peace in believing. About this time he was very impressed by a book called "Antidote to Arminianism" by Christopher Ness, published in 1700. This he edited and re-published. It proved to be the first of a long series of reprints of rare and valuable books of similar character. He also quickly became an acceptable preacher and pastor to a number of country churches, until in 1825 he received a call to Old Brentford, "where he and his family were received by an affectionate and truth-loving people whom he served with abundant blessing for six years. Through his

instrumentality the church was considerably increased, edified and established in the fundamental truths of the Gospel. Brentford was not his final sphere. His name was however fragrant to the people as long as any survived him. He was 52, time had touched him lightly, his best years were before him."

There is no room for more details of this outstanding minister and his work in London, except to say that the names of members of his family can be deciphered on the century old gravestones in the chapel burial ground, and that a great grandson still lives in the district.

When John Andrew Jones left in 1831 the meeting was twelve years old and the foundations were well and truly laid.



GATHERING

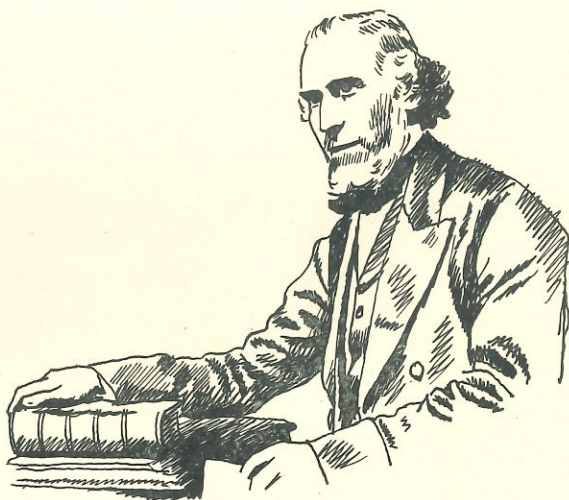
"IF I am lost," said 19 year old Christiana to her father, "None but myself will suffer, you need not trouble yourself about me." And off she went with another gay friend to attend the evening service at the established church. As they passed the Baptist Meeting House, she suddenly remembered that there were to be baptisms there that night. "Let's go and see them dipped," she exclaimed to her companion, and in they went. The sermon did not touch her, but as the minister stood by the head of the pool with those who were to be baptized, he said: "Are not these as brands plucked from the burning?" Those words were never forgotten by Christiana Goodwin. They formed the turning point of her short life. She only lived for three more years, but she lived and died a triumphant believer.

The year when Christiana went to see the dippers was 1832. The minister was Charles Robinson. He was a young man as old as the century. During his time the chapel became

dilapidated. The lease also ran out and "they feared that the candlestick was to be removed." This first meeting house seems to have been opposite to the present building. The landlord showed marked kindness. Though he attended the Church of England he said "he did not wish the Baptist interest to be removed from his premises," and offered them the piece of land upon which the present chapel stands for the very low sum of £100. Furthermore, when he was told that a little extra width would allow better seating arrangements, he promptly gave them a strip of land from the bottom of his own garden.

The new building was opened by George Comb, (friend of John Andrew Jones) in 1839.

Charles Robinson ministered at Old Brentford for thirteen years. No particulars have survived, but we know from his own words that "the church and congregation increased twofold." That he was a man of enterprise is shown by a small poster still in the chapel announcing a preaching service in the market place. His next call was to Borough Green and there his tombstone can be seen. Perhaps it is some indication of his character and his message that the words used for his conversion "Looking unto Jesus" were also at his own request the text of his funeral service.

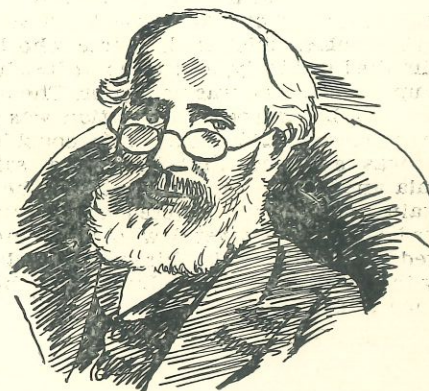


SCATTERING

AFTER Charles Robinson left there was no pastor until 1849. That year was remarkable for an outbreak of cholera. There were days of public prayer. Among the thousands who died were a number of Particular Baptists. One woman was taken ill in the chapel.

The next regular pastor was C. H. Coles. It is very difficult at this distance of time to say what sort of a man he was. A coachman by profession and an occasional preacher in Independent chapels, later he came under the influence of Pastor Curtis of Homerton Row. After that he became pastor of a Baptist church in Reading. He seems to have been a lively, talkative, active sort of man, but perhaps he lacked steadiness. He invented an ointment and advertised it in the "Earthen Vessel" and similar periodicals. It is still in use today. He made a great impression on Old Brentford Meeting, and was quickly chosen as pastor by the unanimous vote of the church. The congregation rapidly increased, and all went well until June 1854 when he asked the deacons to meet him at his house. He told them that he had changed his mind with regard to church order. The changes were not acceptable. He promptly resigned and opened another meeting in Brentford, on the lines of the Plymouth Brethren. A few members followed him.

When he left, just a century ago, the meeting had been in existence for 36 years. The number who had joined in that time was 252. The building was enlarged in that year, a gallery erected, a vestry, schoolroom and stable were also added. The subsequent history of Mr. Coles is lost. He wrote a book justifying his action at Brentford, which was very pertinently reviewed in the "Earthen Vessel." Although his short ministry ended a century ago, the careful observer may conclude that some of his ideas are still bearing fruit to this day.



JOGGING ALONG

JOHNSON Parsons, minister at Chesham, a little, weakly man, 40 years old, wrote in a magazine of the death of 10-year-old Elizabeth Pettitt. In

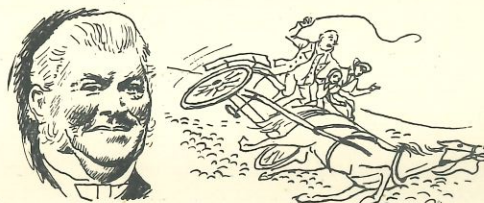
it he showed a tenderness and sweetness which explained, perhaps, why he became pastor at Brentford and remained so for a quarter of a century. He was born in 1819 near Godalming, and experienced hardships incredible to us but common in the 'hungry forties.' There is in existence a very vivid account of his early life. Unfortunately we have no room here for the details, except to note that his conversion came about through the ministry of the celebrated Joseph Irons. Later on he told Mr. Irons that he felt some deep stirrings towards doing something in the preaching line. "Don't say a word to a soul," said the minister. "If the Lord wants you He knows where to find you. There are three doors to be opened—let the Lord open them all. The first is a door of entrance to the truth, the second is a door of utterance, the third is a door of acceptance by others." This advice he followed. It was in February 1859 that Mr. Parsons came to Brentford. It was "hoped that through his instrumentality the cause might be revived." Ten years later we read in one of the magazines of "jogging along as usual at Old Brentford chapel." Three years after that, the editor of the *Earthen Vessel* asks pointedly: "How is it that a church standing over fifty years has a membership of only 72?" "Jogging along" was probably the answer. We read that in 1882 the chapel had a new roof, and that the old box pews were replaced by those in use today.

Of all that long ministry of 27 years scarcely any traces can be found. In 1882 Mr. Parsons had a stroke. His face and limbs on one side were paralysed. A high seat was built into the pulpit and he struggled on. The lowest ebb in chapel affairs was passed. Four new members were baptized soon after and others followed, but the poor minister's troubles thickened. Those who looked after him died suddenly, and when at last he had to give up his work, he was very poor. The church was poor too, but a special collection was made and he received £216. With this considerable sum it was expected that he would sail for Tasmania and join a son out there, but he married again instead and lingered on for another 18 years! There are several who can remember the aged man sitting in his pew Sunday by Sunday in the chapel that he loved, until he died at the age of 83.

WORTHIES

SEARCH among papers relating to this little history has given a peep or two into the lives of some of the congregation.

Jacob Haynes was a lad in Brentford during the Napoleonic wars. He and another youth boarded with an employer who expected them to attend a place of worship on Sundays and to bring home the text. This youth and Haynes went together but as soon as the text was read, went out to a public house. Next time the other youth presented the same bait again, saying directly the text was announced: "We've had enough of this, let's go and have rum and water." But Jacob's conscience was uneasy and he refused. His conversion followed and he was eventually baptized in the chapel. He built up a business in Brentford by his own efforts and left a fortune.



Born a year or two before Haynes, was a character who meant and still means a great deal to Brentford chapel folk.

James Jeffs was born at Ivinghoe, Bucks, in 1792 and in his own words, "was brought up strictly to the Church of England, yet loved sin and worldly pursuits. I was in the choir but through the clerk refusing to lend me a tune book, I left and went to chapel." The text was "Harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Poor James was in great distress, lost! lost! lost! rang in his ears for many months, until one evening, wandering wearily in the fields, the lines of the hymn, "Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise," suddenly came into his mind, and streams of mercy entered his soul. The next year he was baptized and when, in 1824 he removed to Brentford, soon found a spiritual home in the Old Brentford Meeting. When later he moved to Hounslow, this remarkable man kept up his attendance at Brentford but also started the Hounslow Strict Baptist Meeting, which has recently celebrated its centenary.

At the age of 80 he was driving his trap home after prayer meeting when his horse slipped on the icy road and the old man's thigh was broken. He was carried home in a chair, the leg was set and in a few weeks he was about again. The writer has often heard this scene described by a grandson who was in the trap at the time. I have in my possession a number of eighteenth century coins taken by the redoubtable James over the counter of his leather shop in Hounslow.

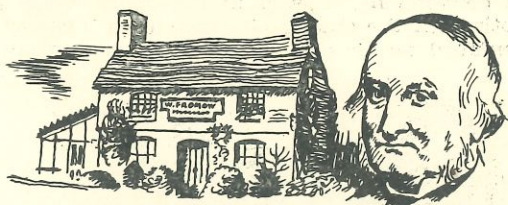
When four converts were baptized together in Mr. Parson's time, we read that, "Brother Jeffs,

the senior deacon, 91 years of age, was present and witnessed one grandson baptizing another grandson in the presence of four generations of his family." Here is one of the old man's sayings, observed, I think, on a tombstone:

Life's uncertain, death is sure,

Sin's the wound and Christ the cure.

He died while on holiday at Hastings in his 93rd year.



In 1829 there came to Chiswick a certain head gardener from Attleborough in Norfolk, with his wife and only son. He took over an old fruit farm by Turnham Green. Thus was founded a family business which has flourished for five generations.

Little is known of the first William Fromow beyond the fact that he walked to the Surrey Tabernacle and back to be baptized without saying a word to his family. This fact might also have remained unknown but that Ann, his wife, discovered his wet clothes hidden in an empty water butt! He did not live long in Chiswick. In doing a good turn to a neighbour, he injured himself and died soon after. His wife also died and William, the only son, was left to carry on alone. He joined Brentford meeting about 1840. Later he became a deacon; his signature appears on the chapel title deeds. He remained in membership for 46 years until his death in 1887. His wife was Sophia, a daughter of the patriarch James Jeffs. By her he had a numerous family. Four sons—William, James, Joseph and Edwin—all worked hard and well in both business and chapel affairs. James was the outstanding figure and was chosen church secretary. He it was who first brought Robert Mutimer to Brentford. But in early middle life, returning one day from chapel, he fell and injured his knee. Septic poisoning set in and proved fatal within a month. A man of his stamp could ill be spared. Fortunately for the church there were, and are, others of the same name and of similar character to carry on where he left off.

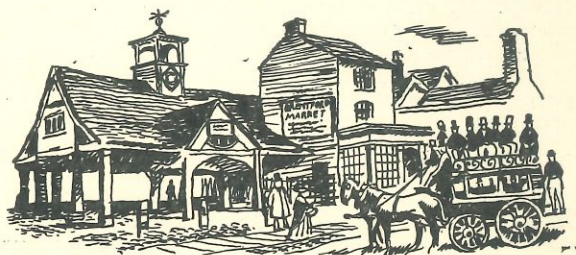
Space fails to tell of many other worthies. Benjamin Gregory must be named, and his wife Elizabeth, both very early members of Brentford. He was Clerk of H.M. Works at Kew and builder of the English House and the Palm House. His death was in 1872 at the age of 92! His son Benjamin was also a deacon. He had a business

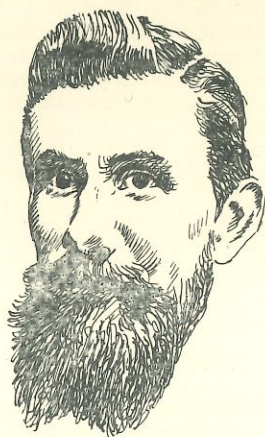
connected with the river and it is still related how that after a great storm in the 'sixties he removed six barge loads of broken glass from the hot-houses in Kew Gardens. He did not attain to the years of his father, but died in 1897, 64 years old.

Then there was busy, active Ebenezer Marsh, never forgetting his welcome to Brentford by James Jeffs, preaching here and there; used in the conversion of young Robert Mutimer; sending out reluctant Pastor Peters; burying his great friend—another Brentford man—T. B. Voysey, a grandson of James Jeffs. He too was an active man. His "gifts" made room for him. Sunday School teacher, superintendent, deacon, secretary, pastor, all in quick succession, but quenched by death in his forties.

One other well-remembered name to close the list—Frederick Secrett, a quiet man, son of an enterprising builder of Notting Hill Gate, and himself a pioneer of building development in the Ealing district. He was a teacher in Brentford Sunday School for sixty years! and died in 1936 at the age of eighty.

As the nineteenth century passed into its last quarter, an epoch ended. The founders had died. In their places were numerous children and grandchildren, nephews and cousins, aunts and uncles. A social atmosphere appeared. The families stabled their horses and ponies at chapel. Lunch was supplied. The pot-boy called with jugs of porter after morning service on the Sabbath. What gatherings there were, and what jauntings to Dorset Square and elsewhere to hear favourite ministers! The town was changing too. The chapel was no longer advertised in the list of country churches but appeared under the London list. Old and New Brentford had merged. The gas works had already reared its hideous silhouette. Bear-baiting in the market place had ceased. The old market hall had also disappeared, as had the old chapel which stood beside it, and is mentioned on the first page of this history. "New North Road" had become North Road. The stage coaches, "every half hour from Paul's," had gone. Horse buses took their place. Yes, times were changed.





HARVEST

ON Thursday afternoon, June 29th, 1893, there came to Old Brentford Baptist Chapel a tall young shoemaker. He was 31 years of age, with thick curling hair, rugged features, kind but flashing eyes, a bushy brown beard, and a great rumbling Suffolk voice. A countryman, a rustic perhaps, and no great scholar, but a man of real ability and ardent zeal. Sharp eyes and wise heads among the deacons had noted these things and acted too, for on this day that same young preacher was officially recognised as their pastor. There is no need to describe in full the happenings of that day. Those who are familiar with such occasions will well imagine the scene. First the address on the "Nature of a Gospel Church" by one minister; then the "Call by Grace" of the new pastor and after that his "Call to the Ministry." Then his declaration of the "Doctrines he intended to preach." Deacon Gregory followed with an "Account of the Lord's Leadings" in making the choice. Finally, the chairman called upon members to confirm the choice of the minister by holding up the right hand, and himself joining the hands of the new pastor and deacon, concluded the ceremony by saying "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

So began the long and successful ministry of Robert Mutimer. He remained in his post for 44 years. The most thriving period of the church; membership increased enormously. The chapel was packed; it became impossible to rent a "sitting." Under his influence the assembly became itself a source of supply to other churches. At one time it could be said that the church sent out six full time pastors and twelve itinerant ministers. The Pastor's Bible Study Class became

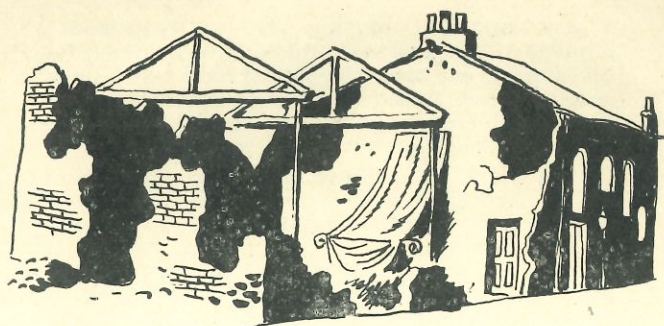
a very important meeting. He was requested a number of times to take the Song of Solomon for his subject, but after refusing several times he at length assented, and a string of conversions followed his lectures upon that book. In all departments the work grew and prospered.

He was born at Wilby in Suffolk and brought up by God-fearing parents to attend Laxfield Baptist chapel, which he did as little as possible, until he heard young Ebenezer Marsh. After that he was in great distress of soul for two long years. So great was his despair that he attempted to drown himself, but the very next day he was brought into happy liberty through a sermon on the text "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious."

Young Robert immediately felt a great concern for others. He commenced a Sunday Evening prayer meeting at his home. Later he began to give an address at these meetings, and the attendance grew to more than a hundred and had to be transferred to a barn. Besides this, he was deacon and Sunday School superintendent at Laxfield. Doors began to open for him in the surrounding villages. He received numerous invitations to preach at different chapels, among which was Brentford.

It is obviously impossible to describe in detail the long pastorate of this great minister. Suffice it to say that the work was more than maintained through world-war I, and on into the days of the dole and unemployment, through the great trade depression of 1931 and rising international tension until 1937. At this period he came to feel very strongly that his work at Brentford was finished. His first request for release was resolutely refused by a people who loved him, but when subsequently he insisted upon resignation it had to be accepted.

The dearest wish of Robert Mutimer was expressed in his own words: "My desire is that with my latest breath I may cry, Behold the Lamb!" His wish was not granted and a touch of sadness rests over his last days. During world-war II, he was living in Croydon as minister to the church at Derby Road. One night his home was destroyed by a bomb. He escaped all bodily injury as by a miracle, but from that time his memory began to fail. During the last year of the war he was sometimes to be seen attending the services in the chapel where he had preached so long. He still looked a hale old man, but his memory had gone and only the faces of his oldest acquaintance brought any gleam of recognition. But God was good and merciful, so that even in these circumstances he remained cheerful and busied himself in the preparation of sermons preached half a century ago. Nor was this state long continued. Three months after the war was over, his warfare ended too.



WAR

THE war which swept away so much and shattered the minister, also shattered the building. In October 1940, almost exactly a century after it was built, a bomb fell which left the walls standing and part of the roof still on. But that was all. Since that time no voice has sounded from the broken pulpit and the dusty pews have had no occupants.

Our minister during those difficult and dangerous times was Pastor Caten, now of High Wycombe. He is a man whose gifts and sterling worth are sufficiently well known among us to need no description here, except to say that he is held in grateful remembrance by many old friends at Brentford, not least by the writer of these notes who was baptized by him in 1940.



TODAY

IT is more than seven years since a tall and still youthful timber merchant left his tractors, his trees, and a beautiful country cottage in Surrey for the working class district of Brentford.

He left the forest glades to labour in the ugly shadow of the gas works at the call of God. It is true that the invitation came from the church, but before it was accepted there were several months during which our present pastor, David Mann, anxiously searched his Bible and prayed to the Lord for indications that this change was of Him, and not of man. Mysterious providences were no new thing to him. Years ago he was in training as a missionary for China. Then came dangerous illness and seeming disappointment, so that it was with more than ordinary seriousness he pondered this new step. Eventually he found himself unable to escape from the words in Genesis 35, 1 "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there." And so commenced his regular ministry among us. His duties are both numerous and arduous. Great patience has been shown, the trials, disappointments and sorrows of the work have been great, but we believe it is also true that the joys have been greater still.

The war reduced our numbers and the register now contains 78 names. The war also united those who were left, and there still remains a singularly close unity between the pastor and his people. Ever since the war ended, the ruined state of the chapel was a great handicap to the work. For several years one delay after another has hindered re-building. Fortunately some extension was made in 1904 at the north end of the building, and provided room for the work to be continued. Some time ago the writer discovered this notice in a religious periodical concerning the alterations just mentioned:

"Mr. R. Mutimer placed in the wall at the south-east corner of the building a very interesting document which was found during the alterations. It had originally been placed there in 1839; it was a record of the church since its formation in the year 1819. With this copy we also deposited a further testimony to the praise of God who has preserved the church faithful to His Word and delighting to walk in the old paths in which our fathers trod."

One night during the winter of 1949 Pastor Mann, some deacons and a few curious friends, invaded the dusty, ruined chapel and by the help of a cycle lamp soon discovered the site of the 'bottle.' And now in October 1954, fifty years exactly to the week since the last re-opening, we have the opening of the new building and a similar ceremony to that enacted in 1839 and again in 1904, is to be repeated. The present generation also add their tribute of praise to God and maintain the same steady adherence to the beliefs and practice of a true Gospel Church.





SERVICES

The Gospel of full and free salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is faithfully preached each Lord's Day at 11.0 a.m. and 6.30 p.m.

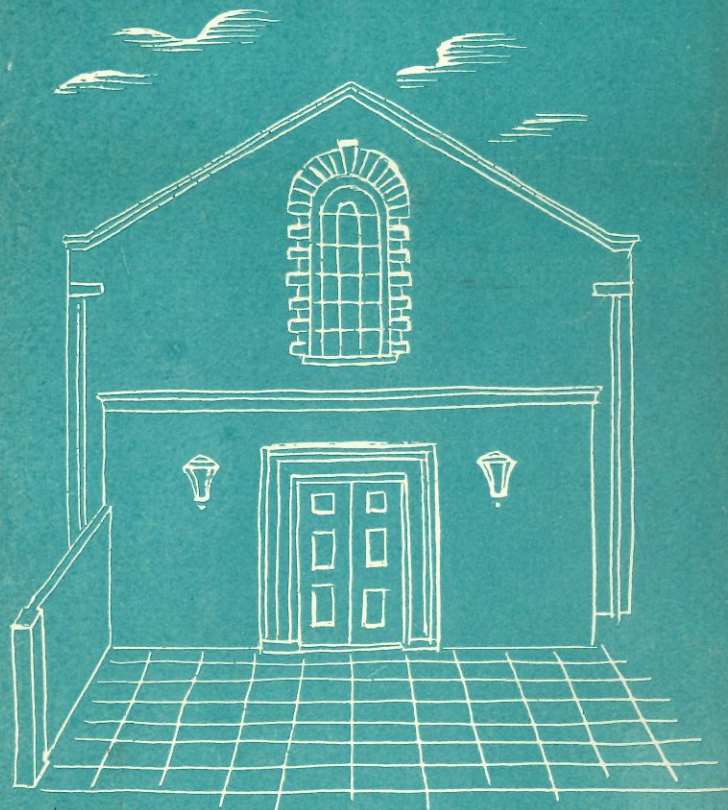
Children are lovingly welcomed and carefully instructed in the Holy Scriptures in our Sunday School at 10.30 a.m. and 2.45 p.m.

A friendly hand is offered to the women folk of Brentford at 2.45 p.m. every Monday.

For particulars of these and other meetings apply to the minister, Pastor David Mann, 19 Queen Anne's Grove, W.5, who will also be glad to visit any who wish him to do so.

The Harlington Press, Hayes, Middx.

Old Brentford BAPTIST MEETING



Founded 1819

ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE