

*The First 100 Years History of the
Swannington / Coleorton Baptists*



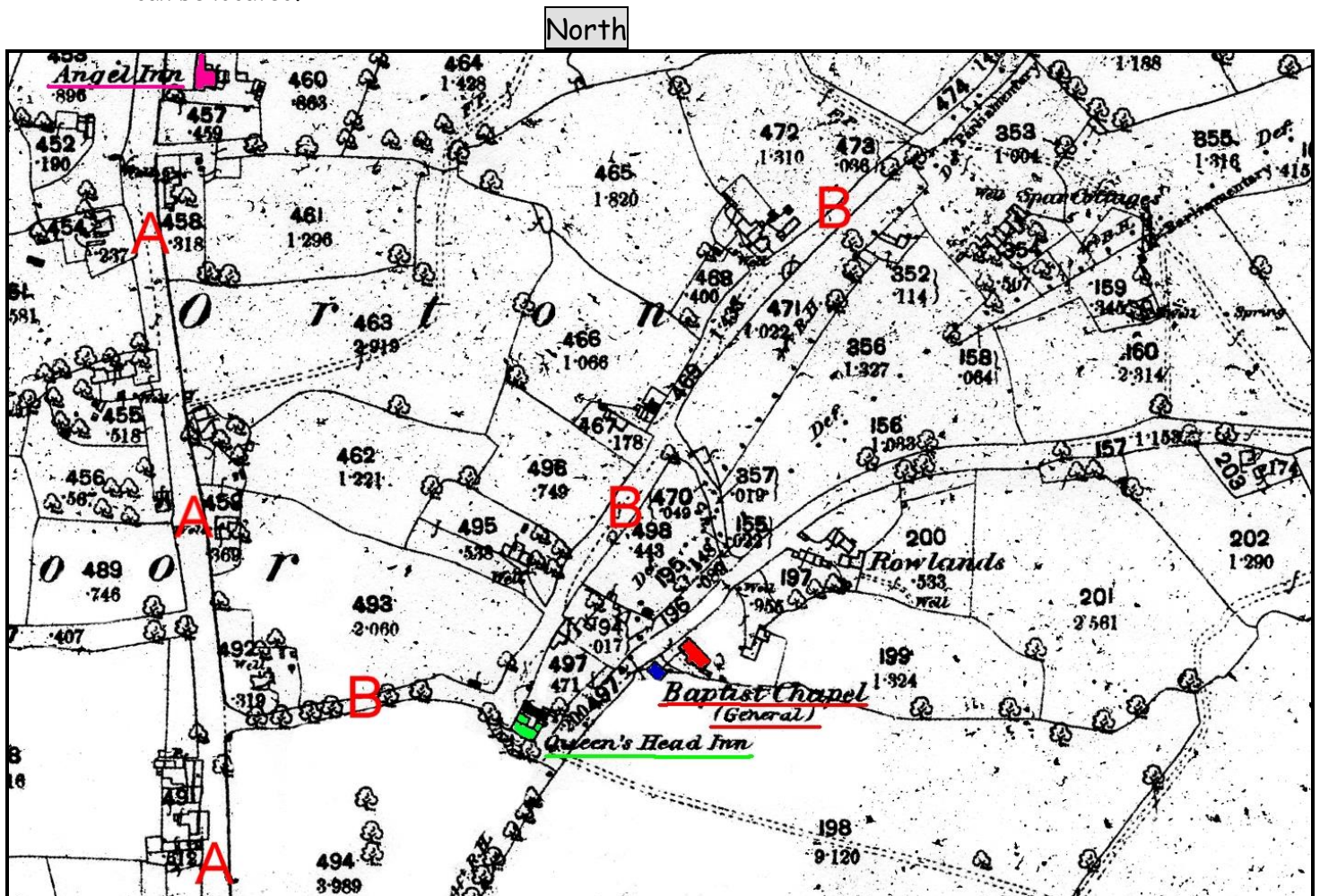
By Samuel T Stewart - July 2020

PUBLISHED BY SAMUEL T STEWART

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It has been extremely difficult to find information on the Baptist movement in the locality of Swannington and Coleorton, but the following is an attempt to put into perspective the facts as we know them to date. It is hoped that this article will act as a catalyst for further information to be made available. The majority of the research comes from newspaper articles and an old Baptist "Our Union Magazine", thought to be dated 1908, although the information therein is rather sketchy. The author hopes to publish an article on the second 100 years history at a later date, if sufficient informative research material can be located.



The above 1881/82 surveyed 1885 published O/S map is included to provide the reader with an understanding of the geographical area referred to later.

At this time, the Baptist Chapel was in Swannington Parish.

Key

- A - The Moor, Coleorton
- B - Moor Lane (formerly Workhouse Lane)
- Angel Inn - coloured pink
- New Baptist Chapel - coloured red
- Old Baptist Chapel building - coloured blue
- Queen's Head Inn - coloured green

The earliest record the writer could find of the local Baptist movement is contained in a book entitled "Historical Memorials of Barton, Melbourne & other Baptist Churches" by J.R.Godfrey (Senior Pastor of the Barton Church) which was published in 1891. The following paragraph is taken from that book:-

"These earnest evangelists established services at Swannington soon after the formation of the society at Barton-in-the-Beans; the meetings being held in cottages and in the open air. People came to these services from numerous other villages far and near, Melbourne amongst them; and when Francis Smith and some others were led into the light of God's redeeming and forgiving love, they requested the evangelists to come and preach at Melbourne also. This was in the year 1747".

Information recorded on the Swannington heritage Website (Now & Then), refers to the Quaker non-conformist movement in the Village. This movement apparently declined and left the village in the 18th century and the Baptists apparently started to use the former Quaker meeting house in 1807, but later moved to other premises near the boundary with Coleorton. This fits in with the future chronological development of the local Baptist movement as described in the following pages. Below is thought to be a copy of the registration certificate for the former Quaker meeting house Baptist chapel. The denomination did not have to be given on the Certificate of Registration.

A101 - SWANNINGTON CHAPEL CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION	
Level (click link to browse related records)	Collection
Acquisition Terms	Donated : 18 September 1990
Ref	DE3720
Title	SWANNINGTON CHAPEL CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION
Description	Certificate of registration of a chapel owned by James and Luke Sharpe at Swannington, as a meeting place for Protestant dissenters, issued at the Archdeaconry Court of Leicester [denomination not specified]
Date	18 June 1808
Access Status	Open

In order to save any future confusion, it is worth mentioning at this stage, that it was not until 1866 that Swannington became a civil parish in its own right. For several centuries it was a chapelry, and one of three townships in Whitwick. Similarly, in 1875, Thringstone Township became an autonomous parish. Coleorton first became a civil parish in 1837. The word parish is used loosely in historical records at times, particularly when referring to the

location of villages, prior to them receiving official parish registration. This can sometimes prove very confusing to the amateur researcher.

In 1798, Hugglescote Baptists separated from the Barton-in-the-Beans society, and formed a mission including Ibstock, Heather, Ravenstone, Coleorton, Swannington, Thringstone, Whitwick, Markfield, and Stanton-under-Bardon. Coalville, although within the area, was only a hamlet at this time. Apparently, Coleorton was known to the preachers of Barton-in-the-Beans, but was judged to be one of the places for which - *"it was difficult to find supplies (presumably supply preachers) and to visit"*.

Local Swannington, Limby Hall and Coleorton Baptists first worshiped in cottages, before the first actual chapel was established, which was on the very edge of the Coleorton border, but definitely located first in Swannington and then Swannington Parish. This was in the area now known as "The Rowlands". They were always referred to as the "Coleorton Baptists", which is actually a misnomer, as in fact, there never was a Baptist Chapel located within Coleorton parish!

The reader will see later that when the original building was used as a Baptist chapel, and then the new chapel adjacent to it was built, both were in Swannington and Swannington parish respectively. The new chapel, known as "Coleorton Baptist Chapel", never became part of Coleorton parish even after the geographical boundaries were changed. Anyway, it is now too late to put things right. It is known, that in the year 1807, stated worship was held in a cottage in "Room's Row", which c.1908 was still standing, and was apparently named after the owner of the property. The author has no knowledge of where "Room's Row" was, but it was almost certainly in the area of what is now called "The Rowlands".

Another record stated that "in 1823 a chapel was engaged, and an attempt made to establish a cause". This was unsuccessful and given up in 1825. It is clear that efforts to establish a chapel materialised, as the following advertisement proves:-

Leicester Journal - October 7th 1831

COLEORTON, LEICESTERSHIRE.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,
BY J. TOONE,
At the House of Mr. F. Potter, the Queen's Head
Inn, in the parish of Thringstone, on Monday,
the 10th day of October, 1831, at 4 o'clock in the
afternoon precisely,
ALL that HOUSE and BAKEHOUSE at-
tached; also, two Tenements, and a Chapel,
with convenient outbuildings, gardens, and about
1½ Acre, more or less, of excellent Pa-ture
Land; the whole now in the occupation of Mr.
Thomas Potter and his under-tenants.
To view the above, apply to Thomas Potter, on
the premises; and for further particulars, to the
Auctioneer, Baxter-gate, Loughborough.
One-half of the purcha-e-money may remain on
the property, if required.

Supplementary information on the Queen's Head Inn etc., - The Queens Head Inn, where this auction was held, was actually re-built in 1827 and continued as a public house until the early 1900's and later became a private residence. The chapel, mentioned in the description of the buildings adjacent to the Inn was put up for auction again in 1832, as shown below. The Queen's Head was actually in "Thringstone Township" at this time, and the other buildings just around the corner would have been in Swannington. They were all grouped together in an area now known as "The Rowlands".

The following advertisement confirms the use of this Chapel by "a society of the particular Baptists". So, we now have conclusive proof that the Baptists (Calvinistic) were active in this area. The "Union Magazine" states that a Mrs. Sherwin, resident in the village (Coleorton), purchased the chapel belonging to the Calvinistic Baptists of the place and gave the "General Baptists" the privilege of its use on agreement to pay one pound per-annum acknowledgement. The lady is described as having been a good Christian and a great help to the church until her death. This lady must have been Elizabeth Sherwin, the wife of the wealthy Coleorton hosier William Sherwin, although her husband was a strong supporter of the Church of England in the area. **The reader can refer to the book entitled "The Coleorton Sherwins' 1739 - 1887" for further details of this important and respected local family. This is free to download and read.**

Leicester Chronicle - July 28th 1832 (advertisement)

Freehold Chapel at Swannington

In the county of Leicester

To be sold by auction

By B. Cheatle

At Mr. Potter's the Queen's Head Inn in Thringstone, in the county of Leicester on Wednesday, the 1st day of August next at 5 o'clock in the afternoon, subject to conditions to be then produced.

All that building recently erected for, and now, for sometime past, used as a chapel, or place of worship, by a society of the particular Baptists, situate near "The Rowlands", in Swannington aforesaid, with the appurtenances thereto belonging. The property is capable of being converted into dwelling houses at a trifling expense, and immediate possession may be had.

To view the premises, applications to be made to Mr. Boulton, of Coleorton, of whom, or of Messrs Dewes and Fisher, solicitors, Ashby de la Zouch further particulars may be obtained.

Ashby de la Zouch July 23rd 1832.

In 1833, apparently a successful church and the formation of a Sunday school were established. Shortly afterwards, in 1834, the names of members of Coleorton began to appear in the Hugglescote register. This would have been during the pastorate of Hugglescote of the Rev. Thomas Orton. At this time, stories were still afloat of his primitive method of journeying to and fro by means of a "donkey and carriage". Amongst the early workers living in the neighbourhood to carry on the work, were Luke Sharpe of Limby Hall, and his son, Francis Sharpe. The former was apparently the first superintendent of the Sunday school. At his death, a Mr. Joseph Walker succeeded to the office. Amongst the members of the church or district at that period, were Edward Johnson, James and Mary Davies, Mary, Sarah and Elizabeth Sharpe, Thomas and Mary Toon, James Halfpenny, Richard Williamson, Jeremiah and Joseph Smith, Sarah Marsden, of Limby Hall and others.

Around 1872, there was apparently trouble within the camp. For some time, efforts were made to get rid of the so called "dissenters". The building was now apparently owned by Sir George Beaumont, **and we know that he would not allow non-conformist religion to be established in Coleorton.** There is a record that the chapel was rented at £5 5s p.a. which was almost certainly from Sir George Beaumont. The rented building was apparently allowed to fall into sorry dilapidation. The rector of Coleorton, William Beresford Beaumont acquired the building and started a day school there. It was said that these were pretexts for disturbing the Baptist people, which was almost certainly true. Bear in mind that the building was in "Swannington parish" at this time. An 1836 newspaper advertisement suggests that Sir George Beaumont also owned the Queens Head Inn at that time.

Anyway, it was no longer possible to meet in the hired premises, and therefore, in 1873, during the pastorate of the Rev. J. Salisbury M. A., the friends at both Hugglescote and Coleorton set to work. It is worth mentioning that Ibstock separated from the mission in 1877, leaving Coleorton (Swannington) as the only branch. A plot of land formerly belonging to a Mr. Thos. Swayne, and situated in Swannington parish next to the old ground, was secured in June of that year, and on it, shortly afterwards, a new chapel was built. Schoolrooms were added prior to 1908. The minister, Rev. J. Salisbury visited more frequently, and a contribution of £20 annually towards the ministerial stipend was made. In 1882, the following appeared in the Leicester Chronicle and demonstrates that the chapel was extremely active.

Leicester Chronicle - March 18th 1882

Baptist Chapel Coleorton - The "Blue Ribbon Movement" has reached **Coleorton**? The first meeting was held in the Baptist Chapel on Wednesday when Mr. J. Varley of Leicester and others advocated "total abstinence" (*from alcohol*). 57 names were enrolled.

On the preceding map, it designates the Baptist Chapel as being "General". This actually meant that the congregation were known as "General Baptists". The "Old Baptist Union" was founded in 1880, owing largely to the labours of Henry Squire, an itinerant preacher. The churches of the "Old Baptist Union" are considered "General Baptists", because they held positions of general atonement - "that in his death, Jesus atoned generally for the sins of all men, making it possible that anyone who believes the gospel might be saved".

In 1894, the roof of the schoolroom was raised and a gallery added, and heating apparatus was installed. The photograph on the next page, taken c.1900, clearly shows the raised section of the roof, over the schoolroom.

Leicester Chronicle - June 25th 1892

On their way from Ashby, a Liberal Party meeting was held in the school room attached to the Baptist Chapel at Coleorton led by Mr. McClaren of Leicester. **From there they went to the Wesleyan Reform Chapel at Griffydham.**

Grantham Journal - September 18th 1897

Baptist Chapel Anniversary - On Sunday, September 12th, The Rev. G. Kendrick of Coleorton, preached two excellent sermons in the above place of worship. On Monday, the anniversary tea meeting was held, when upwards of ninety people attended, the trays (food?) being given. A public meeting followed, when interesting addresses were delivered, the pastor (Rev. J. B. Field) presiding. Financially, the results of the anniversary were satisfactory.



Towards the end of 1901, classrooms were built, likewise a "Baptistery". Hitherto, the stalwart converts had always journeyed to Hugglescote to be baptized, for whereas there had been a baptistery in the old rented chapel, **it was so full of frogs, Lizards and other creatures, that its waters were not disturbed.** Hence it was a proud day for the friends at the branch, when on February 2nd 1902, the first baptism at home of four candidates took place. Since then, 25 others had troubled the waters.

Baptism of believers by full immersion

This is perhaps the most obvious difference between Baptists and other denominations. Baptists reject infant baptism, thinking instead that baptism is for believers only - those who can personally declare Jesus as Lord. Some churches still baptise those who were baptised as infants in another Christian tradition, others respect that various denominations do things differently. The baptism is carried out by full immersion. Most Baptist churches have a baptistery, which is more or less a pool (about 4m x 3m) in the church. During a baptismal service, the minister and the people being baptised enter the water. The minister, holding the person, will lay them back in the water so that they are totally immersed, and then bring them back up again. Baptists believe that this practice is in line with the New Testament practice of baptism, as carried out by John the Baptist.

By 1908, the latest improvement in the structure had been completed. Inside, the whole place had been renovated - new seats, new match boarding for walls and ceiling, and it looked better than it had ever done.

At this time, the attendance started to decline, and times became difficult financially. The pastor at that time preached only one Sunday afternoon in the month, and presided at the Communion Service. Apart from this, the members made their own preaching plan, and had their own Deacons etc, with supply preachers coming from Burton, and a few from Derby and elsewhere.

Several attempts were made to persuade the members to join Whitwick under one pastor, but the Swannington / Coleorton members were apparently too loyal to know what might have been best for them.

The number of members at that time was 59; the scholars in attendance were about 90; and the teachers eleven. Mr. Frederick Hutson, who was only one of many stalwast workers, was worthy of a special mention, having been associated with the school first as a teacher, and then a superintendent for some 35 years.

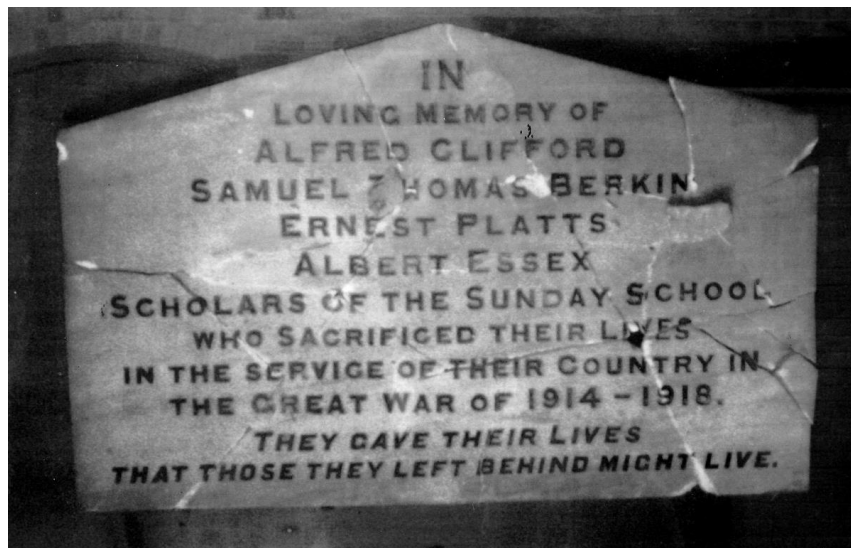


A photograph of the interior of the chapel taken during what was thought to be a Harvest Festival service (date not known, but probably late 1900s)

The chapel finally closed its doors shortly after the millennium, and eventually was converted into a private residence. Below is a recent photograph of the building, and although it is a shame that the chapel had to close, at least the basic building still survives, and its features are clearly recognisable from the original building shown earlier. Those interested in local history are appreciative of the care taken in maintaining the old features of the chapel during its conversion.



A c.2014 photograph of the Baptist chapel now converted into a private residence



The Baptist Chapel 1914-1918 War Memorial plaque which was unfortunately broken. It can be seen in the interior photograph of the chapel.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Abraham Willet worshipped at the Baptist Chapel and was obviously held in high esteem as he was presented with this coffee pot in 1906 by his friends there. His great grandson the Rev. Andrew Willett assumes that the reason for the gift was that he was leaving Coleorton Baptist church as he was moving to Bagworth to work at Bagworth colliery. He took the job of No.1 pit manager, but sadly died in February 1909 aged just 41. Abraham worshipped at Cross Hills Baptist church when he moved to Bagworth and is buried at Cross hills.



Abraham Willet & his wife Jane (nee. Rowell)