

# **THE HISTORY** of **The Battle Baptist Church**



by the

**Rev. F W BUTT-THOMPSON**  
and others



THE HISTORY  
OF  
The Battle Baptist Church:

WITH A  
BIOGRAPHY  
OF  
WILLIAM VIDLER,  
Baptist & Universalist,  
Its First Pastor

---

BY THE  
Rev. F. W. BUTT-THOMPSON,  
The Twentieth Pastor of the Church

---



1909

---

Price - - SIXPENCE.

---

Printed by  
BURFIELD & PENNELLS, Ltd.,  
Priory Street, Hastings.



# **A History of Battle Baptist Church**

by The Rev F W Butt-Thompson and Others

## **PASTORS OF BATTLE BAPTIST CHURCH 1780-1976**

780-1792 W. Vidler  
1793-1794 J. Brown  
1796-1802 J. Davies  
1803-1805 J. Bagnall  
1806-1819 .J. Kinghill  
1820-1827 J. Puntis  
1827-1835 W. Garner  
1835-1841 3. Stennet  
1842-1849 R. Grace  
1849-1853 P. Perkins  
1853-1856 J. Maurice  
1857-1859 J. Pulman  
1860-1863 C.G. Brown  
1863-1872 G. Veals  
1873-1875 G. Wright  
1875-1895 J. Howes  
1895-1897 G.B.. Richardson  
1899-1902 O.W. Screech  
1903-1906 J.R. Hewison  
1907-1910 F.W. Butt-Thompson

1911-1921 P. Stanley  
1921-1923 J. Gotham  
1925-1928 H.J. Dale  
1932-1933 T.O. Weller  
1942-1946 H. Anderton  
1946-1957 S. Kerr  
1959-1963 H. Emmott  
1963-1968 S.W. Gowley  
1969-1976 J. Hunt

The East Sussex of the second half of the eighteenth century was so unlike the East Sussex of today that it is interesting to attempt its reconstruction.

There appear to have been but three main roads, and these were hardly worthy of that title, for the coach from London to Brighthelm-stone took two days for its journey, and even then the optimism of the way-bill was frequently the only thing that did not break down. "Impassable Sussex roads" - so runs the verdict passed upon them by Dr. Burton, a professor of Greek at Oxford, who in 1751 visited his relations in this, "muddy, fertile, pastoral" spot.

### **East Sussex in 1750-1800**

He is also responsible for the statement that the people he saw on the journey were "long-legged, because they stretched their muscles so frequently in pulling their feet out of the mud." <sup>1</sup>

The great majority of the men were farmers, living in houses scattered over the district with many a long mile of timbered hill and dale between. Not much did they think or speak about save the rearing and selling of stock and the advantages or otherwise of the various markets, at which they appeared picturesquely dressed in blue coats, yellow breeches, and top boots. The following may not be the whole of the truth, but it was written by one who knew his subject - "The men's whole attention is given to get their cattle, and everything else fat, their *own*. intellect not excepted." Concerning the ladies we have better things recorded, they were "modest, .... fond of elegance in dress, but, at the same time, fond of labour, and experienced in household affairs..... Both by nature and education. ....better intellectually generally than the men."

The home-life was not such a problem as it is today. They made room in their home for man and maid as well as their own children. Employers and employed with family and friends dined around one sufficient table. After the toil of the day the evenings would be devoted to talk around the heaped-up log fire in the common room. A few may have been brave enough to spend the sixpence or eightpence necessary to purchase the "North Briton" (edited by the famous John Wilks, M.P., and Lord Mayor of London), or the "Kentish Gazette," and so could relate the doings of George the Second and his court\ or the progress of the various wars then on hand; or tell over again the coarse jests of the wayside tavern, and the smug puns of the village squire (that found a place in the pages of newspapers of that period); or excite themselves into a quarrelsome mood in the discussion of the Jacobite chances of success. Of books there were a considerable number, but of little value. "Pilgrim's Progress" and "Robinson Crusoe," and such like had not found their way to such remoteness as this. Picture-books were hawked from village to village, but these "chap books," told of no higher heroes than "Robin Hood," "Jack the Giant Killer," and "Tom Thumb." The majority of the people could not read, hence the illustrations. Yet so well were these books thumbed that few houses could be visited without hearing words of admiration for the Robber<sup>1</sup>'s daring, or the cunning nimbleness of Jack, or the diplomacy of the midget.

Sleep would claim them at a much earlier hour than that at which we moderns are accustomed to retire, and the ghosts that regularly walked the churchyards would have the night to themselves.

---

<sup>1</sup> As late as this the carriages had to be drawn by oxen. In many parts of the "high road", the mud was so deep that wagons stuck so immovably that they would be left until the dry weather. A story is told of a Chichester Bishop, who, when inducting the Rector of a southern parish, made a point of exhorting the clergyman to get away to the abode of his flock as quickly as possible else he would not be able to accomplish the journey until the next summer.

The summer Sundays would be all too short for witnessing the "main of cocks," between rival districts or owners; the "pitch and toss" or "Meg Morrils," played by stealth out of the way of the village constable; the rounders: and - the getting drunk on a pennyworth of gin at the tavern.

The peasantry were almost slaves, even their right to participate in the Poor Law of that day was denied them by an ingenious system of discharging them for a few days each year. They were ragged in dress, famished in appearance, and had an almost chronic lifting of the hand "to pull a meek forelock to their betters." Any feelings of revolt were effectually crushed by the masters, who were almost their owners, and by the English Law. In that day the value of a man's life was the value of a starved sheep. And, lest they should forget, the countryside was dotted with aids to memory, i.e. decaying bodies - swayed with every breeze - dangling from the roadside gallows. Often those bodies represented men whose only crime was the attempt to satisfy the hunger of their children.

Wages for the women averaged £2 yearly; for coachmen, £5 10s.; for shepherds (without food) £20; for farm labourers, their food and a few shillings at Michaelmas or New Year.

In towns like Battle, situate near the ironfields, skilled labour had a little better existence. But what it gained in wage it lost in degradation, John Richard Green says of the time that the inhabitants of the towns were "ignorant and brutal to a degree which it is hard to conceive, for the vast increase of population .... had been met by no effort for their religious or educational improvement."

In this birthplace of Mr. Vidler and his Church, the people were "reared under conditions that engendered sensuous immorality." Mr. George Gilbert found it "a benighted place," and actively opposed to the preaching of the Gospel. And Mr. Vidler himself (in a "A short account of the Planting of the Particular Baptist Church at Battle, Sussex") calls it "a place of darkness." In very few places was "Dissent" known, and where it had gained a footing, it was relegated to the back street of the town, or an obscure cottage in the village.

### **Battle Presbyterians**

The Presbyterians led the way in this neighbourhood. Both in Rye and Battle they formed congregations of some magnitude, owning buildings for their meetings.

In the former place the Quakers had also established themselves. Probably the Free Church life of Kent influenced the district for good, for by this time that county could boast of five Baptist Churches, rapidly completing their century of organised life.<sup>2</sup> It was in the year 1696 that the Rev. Mr. Burnard, Presbyterian divine, settled at Lewes, in the County of Sussex, and it was very soon after that he commenced the regular visitation of the historic town of Battle, some 24 miles away. The zeal of Mr. Burnard must have been very great, else he would never have continuously overcome that long slough of despond that then formed the eastern valley beyond the Downs. The result of his faith and faithfulness was the settlement in this town of a resident minister, Mr. Potter, a "gentleman of character and ability."

The second name on the list of Battle Presbyterian ministers is that of the Rev. Samuel Ashmore. After him came the Rev. John Smith, who had been domestic chaplain to a Mrs. Fagg, of Greenleigh. He was succeeded by the Rev. John Whittel, who removed to Brightelmstone about 1747-8, when the Rev. David Jenkins took the

---

<sup>2</sup> Eythorne 1550? Smarden 1664. Chatham 1664. Ashford 1653. Headcorn 1675.

oversight of the Church. At the beginning of his twenty-five years' pastorate the cause flourished exceedingly, he was "evangelical and able," but, as years went on he found it increasingly difficult to cope with the Arian (or Unitarian) doctrine that was being held by increasing numbers at this time. For some years the chapel was closed, and the remnant scattered.<sup>3</sup>

Just after the death of David Jenkins, Mr. George Gilbert, an Independent Calvinist, of Heathfield, one of the most remarkable of Sussex men, known throughout the south-east of England as the "Apostle of Sussex," came to Battle for the purpose of holding services.

"The occasion of Mr. Gilbert's coming to the town," says William Vidler, "was thus: There was a poor man, one William Sweetenham, that came from Brighton to Battle to make bricks. This person loved the Gospel, but he could go no where to hear it nearer than Heathfield, which is ten miles from Battle; he therefore gave Mr. Gilbert an invitation to come to his house to preach. He accepted the invitation, and in January, 1776, he came and preached to about 40 people in the evening, and the Word seemed to be well received." Another visit was paid in the following February, and again another in March, when the landlord forbade the preaching and a "conversation" was conducted instead, "Several persons seemed to be in earnest about their salvation, the appearance of which set the whole town in confusion."

In May of that year open-air services under the shade of a "wide-spreading oak at the entrance to the town," were started. Noise, blasphemy, and insults resulted. However, some twelve persons acknowledged their need of a new life in Christ Jesus.

The account given in the "Memoir of George Gilbert," is as follows:—"The town of Battle was the next place to which his labours were directed, and in this benighted place, under the cover of a large oak tree, he preached to the people. The opposition at first was violent, and he was exposed to every possible insult; but the Lord blessed his labours, and a Christian Church was formed also in that place.<sup>4</sup> When he first attempted to introduce the Gospel into this town a circumstance occurred which deserves record. A gentleman who had a very enlightened gardener, went, or sent to Mr. Gilbert and requested him to meet his servant for the purpose of disputing with him upon religious subject, being fully confident that such an ignorant man as he supposed Mr. Gilbert to be, would soon be confounded. This being publicly known, a number of persons collected together; but the "natural man knoweth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." And hence, the poor gardener, with all his intelligence, was soon put to silence. The gentleman, finding himself foiled in this attempt, had recourse to another manoeuvre, and introducing a

---

<sup>3</sup> The congregation of Presbyterians, who had followed the Quakers in the town of Rye, and had built the first "conventical" in that town, died out also<sup>5</sup> their building being closed for some years and at last sold to the Wesleyan Methodists in 1773.

<sup>4</sup> George Gilbert was born 1741 in Rotherfield. Enlisted in General Elliot's regiment of light horse, 1759» and went through the greater part of the "Seven Years' War" under Prince Ferdinand and the Marquis of Granby, distinguishing himself in the capture of a French standard. He returned to England, 1763, and was quartered in various towns. In 1776, he was converted at Nottingham. During the next year he was appointed superintendent of the workmen on the estate of General Elliott at Heathfield. The General gave him his discharge from the army, 1779. His spare time was filled with village preaching "till he had introduced the message of His mercy into more than forty different parishes," in many of which he was the means of forming Churches, which continue to this day. He became the Minister of the Independent Church (which he had founded) at Heathfield, at £28 per year, afterwards £40. Built his own house and furnished it principally with his own handiwork. Was given an Assistant Minister in 1809. Died March 23rd, 1827, aged 86 years, after a ministry of 60 years.

poor woman, he said: "Mr. Gilbert, you do not like charity." Mr. Gilbert replied: "Yes, to deserving objects," and ascertaining from a few questions, that she was really a proper object for the exercise of benevolence, he gave her half-a-crown. Two persons who were attracted by mere curiosity to this singular interview, were providentially called by Divine Grace, and became exemplary Christians. Mr. Gilbert used pleasantly to call them "His fifteen-penny converts." "

About the close of the year another house was opened to them. Mr. Gilbert came once a month on the Lord's Day, and generally every Thursday beside. Several ministers who were in connection with "the pious and honourable" Lady Huntingdon, visited them also. When the little gathering had no preacher some sound discourse was read by one or the other of those present. Persecution became very severe, yet in 1779 the monthly Communion presided over by Mr. Gilbert, numbered 50 souls.

A youth, named William Vidler, having for some time been the reader in the absence of other instruction, was asked in April, 1777, by "the people in general" to "speak among them by way of exhortation." Possessed of an outstanding personality, he soon became the leader of his brethren, and his ministry might be said to start from the date just mentioned, for save for a few months' absence in the Isle of Wight, he remained at their head until 1794.

The Rev. James Purdy, minister of the Church at Rye for close on 50 years, became his friend, and eventually baptised him - with two others from Battle - and admitted him to the fellowship of his Church. From the Rye Minute Book we take the following account:-

"At a general fast held in our Meeting Place, February 4th (Friday), 1780, the Church having stopped. It was agreed by the Church to call out our Brother William Vidler by holding a day of Fasting and Prayer the Wednesday night after.

"February 16th, 1780. Being a day set apart for Fasting and Prayer for the calling out into the ministry, Brother William Vidler, who was accordingly, by the whole consent of the Church, set apart for the Ministry of the Word, and had the right hand of fellowship given him by Brother Thomas Purdy, Pastor of the Church.

"At the same time seven persons, viz., Joseph Fuller, Thomas Hazelden, William Askley, Abraham Bodle, Elizabeth Hazelden, Mary Weller, Ann Selms, gave in their experiences to the Church with declaration of their faith in Christ, and conviction of Baptism, and were baptised the same evening. Mr. Daniel Wood gave in his experience the same time, but being poorly in body put off his being baptised. These persons came from Battle, and were among the first baptised to form and plant a Church at Battle.

"Thursday, February 17th, 1780. Samuel Gestel came before the Church and gave, in a very satisfactory manner, of the work of grace on his soul, and of his faith in Christ, and was baptised the Lord's Day following. He also was one that proposed to form a Church at Battle."

Owing to the increase of baptised believers, Mr. Gilbert declined to continue his oversight of the Battle flock, and on March 28th, 1780 the Baptist Church was formed in the town.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Formation of Church**

Rev. Thomas Purdy and the Rev. William Copping of Sandhurst, presided at the formation. Fifteen members were enrolled, and they chose William Vidler as their Pastor.

---

<sup>5</sup> The first six Baptist Churches formed in Sussex were Rye, 1750. Battle, 1780. Lewes, 1781. Uckfield, 1785. Brighton 1786. Hailsham 1795

The following is an interesting extract from the rules that governed this new branch of God's great Church:-

"As members of the same body, united to the same glorious Head - Christ - we feel ourselves under the strongest obligations, in love to Him, Who has, we trust, redeemed our souls -

"To sympathise with each other in time of affliction and trial, and bear each other's burdens, and thus fulfil the law of Christ.

"To walk together in humility and brotherly love, to study each other's advantage, to pray for each other; for the prosperity of this Church; for the outpouring of the Spirit of God upon it: for the advancement of the glory of God in it, and throughout all the Churches of the living God."

The Church agreed to give Mr. Vidler £17 per annum, but his growing family, increasing labour amongst the people, and several "calls" from other churches - especially one from Portsmouth - emphasised the need of augmentation, and it was gradually raised to £50.

Amongst other places he started at Northiam, some nine miles away, visiting the growing cause fortnightly. The Church formed there had a history very akin to that of the parent society.

### **First and Second Meeting House**

Up to 1790, the Battle Church had worshipped in the room of a house two years, and in the old Presbyterian building (purchased by them in 1782) another eight years or more. In the latter half of 1789 a new building was erected for them. It was opened on April 11th, 1790. The membership had grown to the considerable number of 150. The new chapel was soon thronged with hearers, and from the members and friends the sum of £160 was raised. In the May of the next year their Pastor toured among the churches of like faith and practice, but was not successful in raising much of the balance of £700 needed. The last payment was not made until the building had stood 100 years.

The Church was affiliated with the Particular Baptist Association of Kent and Sussex, and on June 9th, 1785, the delegates met at Battle,<sup>6</sup> the Rev\* Thomas Purdy being Moderator.

In 1790 the local Church sent to the Annual Session that met at Tenterden (the 2nd and 3rd of June) the following question: "How far may the temporal concerns of a Church of Christ "be attended to on the Lord's Day?" The following delphic reply was received: "That the temporal concerns of a Church of Christ ought not to be attended to on the Lord's Day, except when it is absolutely necessary."

They also desired the "assistance of the ministry of the associated churches" during the forthcoming absence of their Pastor on their behalf. At the same meetings "the Brethren Purdy and Vidler were desired to draw up plans for an Association Fund, and submit same to the next Assembly."

---

<sup>6</sup> This Assembly discussed an application of the Church meeting at Lewes, for admission into their fellowship. The letter sent was a long one, containing a doctrinal statement and an explanation of the fact that though their "order was that of the Particular Baptist Denomination they admitted Paedo-Baptists to sit down, at the Lord's Table." Perhaps because this was their second application the Brethren saw fit to admit them, but they were warned "to cease from walking disorderly," also that "no Churches in the Association will dismiss members to their fellowship while they continue on the plan of open communion" .... "not judging our Brethren at Lewes a completely organised Church according-to the Law of Christ.!"



### **First Pastor**

In 1791 the Battle Pastor was chosen Moderator of the two counties.

The Minutes read:- "The Messengers of the Churches met on Wednesday, June 15th, at Rye, at 3 o'clock. Brother Vine prayed, and after singing Psalm 133 C.M., Brother Vidler preached from Romans 3:21. Then the 94th Hymn of Watts' Book 1 was read, and Brother Middleton concluded the service in prayer. The names of the Messengers were then called over. Brother Vidler was chosen the Moderator, and Brother Scott the scribe. The preliminaries of the Association were read, and also the letters of the respective Churches in the connection, after which Brother Vidler prayed, and adjourned the assembly at half-past five o'clock."

Several of the members had for a long time entertained doubts respecting the Calvinistic sentiments or "predestination particularly reprobation," and (an old MS. chronicle goes on to state) "Brother Chapman always maintained a hope that there would be a time when all God's creatures would be made holy and happy."

### **Universalism**

The preaching of Mr. Vidler had undoubtedly influenced them in this direction and sundry books, including Winchester's "Dialogues" had been freely passed about. "At last, in order to stop contention, Brother Ashby<sup>7</sup> stated at the monthly meeting in December, 1792, that "as the Church had professed their belief in the

Bible, namely, that the Scriptures is the Word of God, and the only rule of faith and practice, and the Church being sufficient to judge for themselves by it, that the Church should set themselves to examine (without the assistance of their minister) the subject for themselves, and if the Scriptures were found to be against it, to reject it but if for it, to receive it."

This strange Bible Class went on for some time, until Mr. Vidler was asked to state his exact position with reference to the question. He replied that "he had fully made up his mind and judgment on the Universalism subject, and he firmly held the Universal Restoration to be a doctrine of God's Word, and requested only that the Church would give him an opportunity to state the doctrine as he viewed it from the Scriptures, and then he would leave it with them to judge for themselves that he begged they would give it a fair and candid and full consideration, and that, if on examination, they found it to be an error, they had only to say to him, 'Brother Vidler, we have no need of your further preaching amongst us and then he would leave them in peace and in love.'"

Christmas Day (Tuesday, December 25th, 1792) being near, and a day of leisure, the Church fixed that day for him to state his views. At 10 a.m. the Church met; out of 200 odd members, 168 were present. For three hours Mr. Vidler explained and expounded, and then dismissed them to their dinners.

In the afternoon the members returned and debated the question: "Did Christ die only for the elect?" Their minister was absent, by request, so that no undue influence should be exerted. So vigorously did the war wage that at a late hour the meeting was adjourned to the following Monday (December 31st).

---

<sup>7</sup> Mr. William Ashby emigrated to America in 1805. He embarked on the ship "Jupiter" which was wrecked with great loss of life. Mr Ashby was amongst the few saved.

On that last Sunday of the year, Elhanan Winchester <sup>8</sup> changed pulpits with their Pastor. At the Monday meeting all but 15 of the members declared for the new theology. Their chronicle continues:-

"The espousal of the glorious doctrine of the Restoration of all things cost the Church, as well as Mr. Vidler, all the love which had long subsisted in the neighbouring churches towards the Church at Battle. And not only so but their name was cast out as evil in the sight of every denomination ..... But God gave the Church more than all the riches earth could afford, namely, an increased knowledge of the unsearchable riches of Christ, and view of His glorious kingdom, which we never had before. .... This view fully compensated us for all the losses we sustained, either of the love or favour of former friends or temporal support as expected from them."

The Minute Book of their neighbours at Rye, states: "July 1st 1793. At a quarterly Church meeting agreed to disown the Church at Battle as a sister church on account of Mr. William Vidler and many of his people imbibing the erroneous doctrine of Universal Restoration. Also agreed to request Brother Spilstead, Senr., and Sister Ann Howard not to commune with them any longer."

Mr. Vidler had been again chosen to preach the Association sermon (an office he was given frequently, and which was a great tribute to his power in the pulpit) that year 1793. The meetings were held at Chatham (June 4th-5th). The programme was sufficiently disturbed to enable the delegates to arrive on the day previous to the advertised date. Mr. Vidler and his people were solemnly excommunicated, as holding a belief "contrary to the sovereignty of God, contrary to the work of the Spirit, contrary to the efficacy of the death of Christ, as detrimental to practical Godliness, encouraging light thoughts of sin, and destroying that awe which the judgments of God are calculated to inspire." The 1794 records of the Association states:- "Mr. Vidler<sup>1</sup>'s society at Battle having avowed the error of Universal Restoration was separated from the Association in 1793. The Society which now stands in this catalogue, is a small one which separated from that Church, in consequence of the said error."

The year before the Association met at Chatham, a letter had been received from 15 persons announcing that they had withdrawn from the Church at Battle, declaring "their disbelief of the Universal Restoration of Devils and Men from Hell," and desiring advice and help from the Associated Churches. It was agreed that the "Messengers do represent this case to their respective churches."

These fifteen stalwarts, under Brother Wood, sole representatives of the original Baptist Church, held services in each others' houses until numbers compelled them to hire a room.

### **Second Pastor**

Somewhen about 1793-4 they had grown strong enough to have a minister of their own. Mr. J. Brown came to them from Worstead, Norfolk. In the latter year we read of him "Preaching a lecture" from Hebrews 3:1, before the Association assembled at Sandhurst (June 3rd-4th).

---

<sup>8</sup> Elhanan Winchester was an American, who, through John Murray, had adopted the tenet of Universal Restoration, revived in 1750 by James Rely, a fellow-worker of the great Whitfield. Winchester had come to England to spread this doctrine, and in 1787 had drawn together a large and influential congregation at Parliament Court, Artillery Lane, Bishopsgate.

### Third Pastor

In 1795, Sergeant Burton, of the Warwickshire Militia, and a Mr. Bondergham (sent out by the Church at Folkestone) supplied the pulpit, The Rev. J. Davies, from Ramsey, Huntingdonshire, was recognised as Minister in 1796, and two years after a Meeting House of wood was built, "a neat and comfortable place," holding some 200 people. This was erected by James Inskipp, Junr., and John Longley. Their accounts are as follows and still are in our possession.

	£	s.	d.
Meeting House by Estimate	61	14	9
Pulpit and Appendages	4	3	5
Hat Pins, etc.	0	12	7
New Stools and altering old	3	9	5½
Front Gates and Fence	1	5	0½
Pal'd Fence in the Yard	5	7	3
Bricklayers' Work, etc.	30	11	3

### Third Meeting House

Thus for the sum of £107 8s. 9d, the friends had a building of their own and by January of the next year the accounts were paid (by Messrs. Ffoord, Sargent, and Co., on behalf of the Church). From this year, 1798, the land upon which the Meeting House was erected was held upon a yearly lease until 1803, when it was bought by Messrs. Spilstead, Senr., and Ffoord. It is described as triangular in shape, 125 feet long, and from 33 to 6 feet in width, containing about 7 rods. The purchase price was £21. In the year 1810, when it was finally made over to the Church, it is described in the deed as "part of messuage formerly known as the 'Rose and Crown' ". It had been in the possession of the Holman family. When the Church formally took possession of it they did so by a very worthy co-operative movement, in which nearly every member had a share by paying a portion of the price. Their names have been recorded, and are as follows:-

#### TRUSTEES, .1810

William Spilstead, Senr., Ewhurst, Yeoman.  
John Ffoord (written "fford"), Battle, Baker.  
George Sargent, Battle, Draper (died Nov. 15th, 1861.)  
John Bartholomew, Westfield, Yeoman.  
William Mainwaring, Burwash, Clocksmith.  
Luke Philcox, Battle, Cordwainer.  
Thomas Dawes, Rye, Turner.  
Edward French, Crowhurst, Yeoman.

These eight were appointed Trustees of the property (January 2nd 1810).

James Kingsmill, Battle, Gentleman.  
Elizabeth Ffoord (wife of John Ffoord).  
Ann Sargent (wife of George Sargent).

Richard Hounsell, Battle, Labourer.  
William Knight, Battle, Tallow Chandler.  
Mary Sinnock (wife of Richard Sinnock, Gentleman).  
Elizabeth Newington (wife of John Newington, Gentleman).  
Elizabeth Page, Battle, Spinster.  
Mary Philcox, Battle, Widow.  
Elizabeth Wood, Battle, Widow.  
Samual Willis, Burwash, Labourer.  
Thomas Pavey, Burwash, Labourer.  
Richard Hobden, Penhurst, Labourer.  
James Sinden, Warbleton, Labourer.  
Thomas Housley, Robertsbridge, Cordwainer.

The Trust Deed declared the place to be for "the Pious and Religious Exercise and purposes of the members of the said Society or Congregation, who should hold believe and maintain The Tenets and Doctrines of three equal and distinct persons in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit. Election before time to holiness here and glory hereafter. Justification alone by the imputed Righteousness of Jesus Christ. The Salvation of the Elect only. The Resurrection of the Dead. The Last Judgment. Eternal Life for the Righteous and endless death to the wicked."

For 23 years public worship was conducted within its walls, and then it was given over to the little ones, being used for Sunday School work nearly 70 years, and then sold, pulled down, and a row of dwellings (Florence Cottages) built upon the site. It stood a little to the north of Mount Street by the side of the present Roman Catholic Church.

Mr. Davies resigned the Pastorate in 1802. The names of two of his deacons (Ffoord and Sargent) have already been mentioned. Another member, Ann Sargent, baptised and received April, 1797, celebrated her jubilee in the Church fellowship a few days before her death, April 16th 1857.

#### **Fourth Pastor**

In 1803, Mr. J. Bagnall became the Pastor. He had been a member of this Church and a local preacher, and had accepted a call in Leicestershire. Returning by the wish of his former friends, he did good work here for a few months. During his time - between the years 1804-6 - the Wesleyan Church was founded in the town. Mr. Bagnall removed from the Baptists to it, taking with him some of his followers, and conducted their services in a hired room. (The present building in which our friends worship was erected, 1826.)

#### **Fifth Pastor**

The next Minister laboured for 13 years. Coming in November, 1806, the Rev. J. Kingsmill kept the affection of his people to the end. During the last six months of his life (died January 6th, 1819), he was an invalid, and during that time and for some months after the Rev. W. Groser,<sup>9</sup> late of Prince's Risborough, and Mr. W. Bailey, student at Stepney Academy, supplied.

---

<sup>9</sup> William Groser. 1791-1856. 1813 at Princes Risborough. 1820 at Maidstone. 1828 edited "Baptist new Selection." 1839 at London. Edited Baptist Magazine. 1851, Secretary, Irish Baptist Society.

It was in June of 1820 that Mr. J. Puntis came to preach in the town. He also was from Stepney Academy (in 1856 removed to Regent's Park), and his ministry was so successful that in September of that year a larger building was commenced. This is the present chapel, "plain, neat, modernised and commodious," opened in February 1821.

#### **Fourth House**

"On Tuesday, February 27th, 1821, a new Meeting House called Zion Chapel, belonging to the Baptist denomination, was Meeting opened for public worship. In the morning the Rev. J. Ivimey of London read and prayed, the Rev. Mr. Shirley of Sevenoaks preached from Psalm 132;-14. ("This is My resting place for ever; Here will I dwell: For I have desired it.") and the Rev. Mr. Smith, of Rye concluded in prayer. In the afternoon the Rev. James Press<sup>10</sup> (Independent) of Heathfield read and prayed; the Rev. Mr. Ivimey preached from Psalm 27:4 ("One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the pleasantness of the Lord; and to consider in His temple,") and the Rev. Mr. Tidd, of Wadhurst concluded in prayer. In the evening the Rev. Mr. Davis (Independent) of Hastings read and prayed, the Rev. James Hoby, D.D., of London preached from 1 Cor.1:21 ("For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness .of preaching (i.e. the thing preached), to save them that believe,") and concluded in prayer. The services of the day afforded much pleasure to all who were present. It was peculiarly gratifying to the friends of evangelical truth to witness a larger congregation assembled together, on this interesting occasion, for public worship, than has been witnessed in this town for many years. By the persevering exertions of a few pious individuals, the cause of Christ has been carried on amidst much discouragement; and it is hoped that the tide of immorality and infidelity, which has long deluged the town and neighbourhood of Battle, has been arrested in its progress. For two or three years past- the congregation has gradually increased so as to require a much larger place of worship; but being for the most part poor, and suffering from the pressure of the times, they are unable to defray the whole expense of their new place; and consequently an appeal on their behalf must be made to the benevolence of a religious public, which appeal, it is hoped, will not be made in vain."

#### **Sixth Pastor**

The following is also taken from the columns of the "Baptist Magazine" for the month of May, 1821. "On Wednesday, February 28th, 1821, Mr. James Puntis (late student at Stepney Academy) was ordained Pastor of the Particular Baptist Church at Battle, Sussex. The Rev. Mr. Davies (Independent) of Hastings commenced the service by reading the Scriptures and praying; the Rev. Mr. Hoby delivered a very appropriate introductory address, requested of the Church a public recognition of the union that had been formed, and asked the usual questions; the Rev. Joseph Ivimey of London (Baptist Historian) offered up the ordination prayer in a very impressive manner, and delivered an excellent and affectionate charge from 2nd Timothy 2:15, ("Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth") and the Rev. Mr. Tidd of Wadhurst, concluded in prayer. The hymns were read by Rev. Mr. Press. In the evening the congregation again assembled; when the Rev. Mr. Hoby read and prayed; the Rev. Mr. Giles, of Chatham addressed the

---

<sup>10</sup> Colleague of Rev. George Gilbert.

Church from 1 Thess.:13 ("Esteem them exceedingly highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves") and the Rev. Mr. Ivimey concluded in prayer. The services of the day were truly gratifying and will long be remembered by many, as a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord."

The ground upon which the new Chapel was built is thus described: "All that piece of land situate in the Borough of Mount Joy in the Parish of Battle, abutting north on a Chapel and Burying Ground in the possession of a Society called Unitarians: south on a house and premises belonging to Richard Sinnock east on the Public Road leading to London; and west on a garden belonging to Sir Godfrey Webster."

The Trust Deed declared that the Meeting House and Burying Ground were "for the use and benefit of the Society or Congregation of Protestant Dissenters called Particular Baptists, now and hereafter assembling at the said Meeting House and premises, maintaining the doctrines of the One living and True Lord, Three equal Persons in the Godhead, Eternal and personal Election, Original sin and Particular Redemption, Free Justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, Regeneration, Conversion, and Sanctification by the Spirit and grace of God, the moral law a rule of life and conduct to all believers, the final perseverance of the Saints, the resurrection of the body to eternal life, the future judgment, the eternal happiness of the righteous and everlasting misery to such as die impenitent, and the practice of Baptism by immersion to such only as are of years of understanding upon their own confession of repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Trustees appointed April 2nd, 1821, were:-

George Sargent.  
John Bartholomew.  
John Ffoord, of the former list, and  
Richard Sinnock, Battle, Gentleman.  
William Knight (one of the 1810 members).  
Richard Winch, Crowhurst, Farmer.  
David-Stonham, Rye, Draper.  
Edward Hilder, Rye, Ironmonger.  
Richard Weedon Butler, Rye, Surgeon.  
William Harvey Staco, Folkestone, Miller.  
Thomas Edwards, Folkestone, Draper.  
Samuel Green, Sevenoaks, Builder.  
Thomas Southern, Sevenoaks, Distiller.  
William Atwood, Junr., Farningham, Shopkeeper.  
James Stanger, Maidstone, Ironmonger.

The Solicitor of the transaction was Chapman Barber, Esq., Chancery Lane, London.

"Rules of Interment in Zion Burying Ground" were drawn up, wherein it was stated that the fee of four shillings was to be appropriated to repairing the fence, and keeping the ground in order. Every burial was to be paid for "save the minister, or any member of his family." It was to be open to "persons unbaptised, who therefore are not entitled to what is called 'Christian Burial'".

In 1882, Mr. Puntis was chosen Preacher to the Assembly at the Kent and Sussex meetings held at Lewes.

An interesting admission to the membership of the Church was that of John Pepper admitted October 6th, 1822, died November 17th, 1860. Soon after his admission he was appointed Deacon. Up to very recent years some member of the family bearing this name continued in fellowship, and held office, and very usefully assisted the cause.

### **Seventh Pastor**

Mr. William Garner (student at Chipping Norton, under direction of Mr. Gray) succeeded Mr. Puntis in February, 1827. The "proclamation" issued on the occasion being as follows:-

Battle, February 1st, 1827.

"The Members of the Church, assembling at Zion Chapel, Battle, respectfully inform their friends and neighbours that they have engaged the Rev. W. Garner (who now occupies their pulpit) to become their Pastor; and that he will be ordained over them, in the manner usually practised by Protestant Dissenters of their denomination, on Thursday next, February 8th. The Services will commence in the morning at 11 o'clock, and in the evening at 6, and be conducted by the Rev. Joseph Ivimey, of London, and several neighbouring Ministers.

"They take this opportunity of stating that the public worship of the Chapel on the Sabbath Day commences in the morning at half-past 10 o'clock, in the afternoon at 2, and in the evening at half-past 6; that on every Wednesday evening a Prayer Meeting is held, commencing at 7 o'clock, and on the first Monday evening in every month a Missionary Prayer Meeting, commencing also at 7. The Rev. W. Garner also preaches at Bredshill and Netherfield every other Tuesday evening, and at Catsfield and Sedlescomb every other Thursday evening, commencing each Service at 7 o'clock.

### **Sunday School**

They likewise beg to advert to the Sunday School connected with this Chapel in doing which, they feel assured of gaining the approval of every one when they state that upwards of 450 children have been gratuitously instructed in them since their commencement, many of whom would otherwise have received no instruction whatever. The times of School at Battle are from 9 in the morning till the Service of the Chapel commences and from the conclusion of the afternoon service till 5 1/2 at the branch School at Netherfield from 10 to 12 in the morning, and from 1 to 3 in the afternoon. And in reference to this subject, they wish it to be distinctly understood that it is neither their object, their practice, nor their desire, to draw children from other Sunday Schools, but that they seek those children only who are destitute of Sunday School tuition; and that the children are allowed to attend any place of worship their parents wish. A Sermon will be preached on Sunday evening, the 18th February, in behalf of these Institutions. The Anniversary will be holden on Good Friday as usual.

### **Library**

"They also avail themselves of this opportunity to recommend, to the young in particular, Zion Chapel Circulating Library, as peculiarly deserving of their support. The Library at present contains about 100 volumes; and while the greatest care is taken to prevent the introduction of – works of an immoral or irreligious tendency, it is by no means confined to books wholly of a religious character, as may be seen by a reference to the Catalogue, which may be had of Mr. B. Sargent, the Secretary, of whom any particulars may be obtained."

The Rules of this Library were written out at length, and from time to time altered. The following is the second of the original regulations:- "That as the specific object of this Library is the diffusion of knowledge, it consists of works on Theology, Biography, History, Science, etc., to the exclusion of all works on Theological Controversies."

Mr. Garner took part in many of the Association meetings and was very active by voice and pen during his ministry. A tract upon "The Conversion of the Jews," written during his residence here, ran through, many editions, being reissued as late as 1841. After about nine year at Battle, he went for 12 months probation at St. Ives, and afterward accepted the call to that church.

Amongst the members who joined during his ministry were Ebenezer Weller, Charlotte Bones, May 7th, 1830 (died Oct., 1868), and Elizabeth Hutchison, June 3rd, 1832 (died, December 17th, 1862.) "Buried in the Cemetery, she being the first one of our members buried there."

The membership had increased greatly, the brethren who joined walking in to the services from Ashburnham, Darwell Hole, Netherfield Penhurst, Pont's Green, Vinehall, Whatlington, and Wood's Dale.

### **Eighth Pastor**

The Rev. S. Stennett settled in 1835. The following year the Great Hurricane (of November 29th, 1836) swept over the land. Houses were torn apart, barns shattered, and many public buildings destroyed. The chapel was so badly damaged that the cost of repairs was greater than the people could pay. An appeal was issued to other causes and friends. When the answer came from their neighbours at Rye it stated that they had hoped for assistance from Battle, for their own place had been partially unroofed in the storm.

On May 3rd, 1841, Mr. Stennett received the higher call to his Master's ministry. The membership now stood at 64, and 285 children gathered in the Sunday Schools.

### **Ninth Pastor**

The Rev. Robert Grace, who had been for 11 years at Addlestone, Surrey, was the Pastor from 1841 to 1849. In 1844 he subscribed for a copy of Carson's "Baptism", as did also J.C. Sargent and B. Wells officers of the Church. Traces of Mr. Grace's love for controversy can be found in the denominational periodicals of the day, notably "The Baptist Penny Magazine," in whose pages "R.G., Battle," occurs frequently.

The year after Mr. Grace's settlement, Eustace Carey preached here in connection with the Jubilee of the Baptist Missionary Society. His eloquent pleading for the Missionary cause can still be remembered by some. Medals were bestowed upon the Sunday School children, who were exhorted to preserve them for exhibition at the Centenary Celebration.

### **Tenth Pastor**

From Cranbrook, in Kent, came the next Pastor. The Rev. Frederick Perkins had been a Congregational Minister in the Kent town, but upon being baptised took the oversight of the Battle cause. The Church having some non-baptised members, controversy as to "infant sprinkling" and the like became strong at times. Three members - Thomas Ffoord (Sunday School Superintendent), John Miller, and William Seeley, withdrew from membership because of the "violent advocacy" and "powerful artillery thundered forth" of the new convert to Adult Baptism. They, however, continued to attend the services, and take their part in Sunday School and Mission work.



The local Preachers of the Church did good work at the various branches and cottage meetings. William Denyer, John Miller, William Seeley, and Ebenezer Weller,<sup>11</sup> took charge of the two assemblies of the Sunday School, and the two Preaching engagements per Sunday at Nether-field, taking it in turn to superintend and speak, as they did also at another Branch at Darwell Hole.

Mr. Parkins' ministry commenced on August 1st, 1849, and terminated September 29th, 1853. Another member of the Pepper family joined during this time, one Isaac Pepper, whose breezy personality had not suffered by residence in America, and who had a great deal to do with the success of the work. He was elected Deacon in January, 1857.

### Eleventh Pastor

A name that is still held in affection amongst the older members is that of the Rev. James Maurice, albeit his was a very short residence here. Coming in October, 1853, he at once made a place for himself in the hearts of his supporters by his able preaching in the town and district, and especially in the Y.M.C.A., High Street, by his clever and interesting lectures. He left Battle September 29th, 1856.

A curious "bill" for work done dates from the year of this minister's leaving. It is from Thomas Adams:-

	£	s.	d.
April 26 <sup>th</sup> 1853			
2 men and labour 1 day moving the Chappel from John Cross to Whatlington. Cutting and clearing away. Digging and building the Quines. 1 ½ bushell of lim and Teem to do.	1	2	6
August 17 <sup>th</sup> 1855			
Men and 2 days Pointing and Whitewashing lim		8	0
Repairing the Windows		2	0
Men and labour ½ day repairing the Slatting, slate, cement, nails.	3	1	0
Settled February 12th, 1856			

This branch Church at Whatlington had for its Trustees E. Weller; W. Denyer; I. Pepper; Thomas Pepper (Wheelwright of Vinehall); Benjamin Roberson (Shoemaker); R. West; W. Bones; and Edmund Strickland<sup>12</sup> (Corn Factor of Hastings.) The Solicitor to the deed was Robert Young, of Battle (August 6th, 1855).

---

<sup>11</sup> Ebenezer Weller of Mount Street, Miller, gave nearly £1,000 (in addition to ordinary collections) to the Church of which he was a member and deacon for 24 years. His average yearly gift was £40 (max: £59 6s. 9d. in 1848. 1-iiin: £11 5s. Od. in 1854). He died in 1858, and up to the year 1864; £15 per annum was paid to the Church by the Trustees of his estate.

<sup>12</sup> In 1867 a resolution was passed for the last time at the annual Church meeting "thanking Mr. Strickland (then of Stars Green) for his kind and liberal donations to the Church." A like resolution is found in the minutes for a considerable number of years.

During the 18th century there had been a branch at Northiam. In the 19th century the Battle Church had branches in Sedlescombe; Bredshil (Breadsell); Netherfield; Vinehall (afterwards moved to Whatlington); and Darvells Hole.

For some four months (October, 1856, to January, 1857), the Rev. F. Perkins returned, and the rest of the year the pulpit was filled by candidates for the vacant Pastorate.

During 1857 an effort was made to restore "close communion" to the Church life, and was only ended, after some months canvassing by Bro. Bones (against) and Bro. Dann (for) of the members, by the vote being 21 against, 13 for, and 16 neutral.

### **Twelfth Pastor**

The Rev. James Pulman who came from East Purley, Hants., commenced his ministry in December of this year. The next month a Sunday School was started at the Vinehall Mission Station, but in September they combined with the Wesleyan friends in the conduct of all the Vinehall services, "having found the task of supplying preachers every Sunday too much for the limited talent at their disposal."

It is interesting to note that in February of this same year the Church sent petitions to both Houses of Parliament respecting the future government of India.

The Trustees of the Church property living were:-

George Sargent (described as "Out of business")

William Atwood (of Maidstone.)

William Knight (who had established himself as Nursery-Seedsman).

To these were added, on Thursday, September 30th, 1857, the following:-

Ebenezer Weller. Joined April 5th, 1829, died, November 7th, 1858

William Denver (Seedsman, High-Street), joined July 6th, 1834, died March 24th, 1864.

Isaac Pepper (Miller), joined November 4th, 1849, died August 26th, 1872 Joseph E.

Sargent (Rev.), Baptist Minister, Wyken, Warwickshire

Robert West (Shoemaker). Joined 1851,? died May 15th, 1886

George Barnes (Farmer.) Joined December 20th 1857.

William Bones (Labourer). Joined 1851

Joseph Henry Knight (Printer). Joined March 7th, 1858

Thomas Ellis Slaughter, Farmer of Sandhurst, Kent, died September 28th, 1891

Joseph Elijah Butler, Stationer of St. Leonards, died 1898

George Davoy, Dentist, of Lewes.

A new document was prepared, "copied from the old one in the possession of Mr. Martin, Solicitor, Battle, and Brother Denyer was requested for the present to hold the documents on the behalf of the Church."

On April 28th, 1859, the Rev. J. Pulmai, after a ministry of only seventeen months, passed peacefully away. "He died as he lived, trusting in the finished work of the Saviour. His end was peace."

"Happy soul, Thy days are ended,  
All thy mourning hours below."

This year witnessed the advent of the first musical attempt to aid the singing - "Mr. Denyer stated (December 18th) that Mr. Ffoord had some time since kindly and gratuitously placed an organ in the Chapel, by the use of which great assistance was rendered in carrying on the public worship of God, and he thought it desirable that the Church should in some way or other shew their approval and gratitude. It was resolved that a Tea Meeting be hold, and that Mr. Foord and those friends who assist in singing, be invited free of charge." At this meeting, held in January, 1860, Mr. Foord was presented with six volumes of Matthew Henry and Scott's Commentary on the Bible.

### **Thirteenth Pastor**

The Rev Caleb C. Brown began his ministry on the first Sabbath in June, 1860. The building had been renovated and a *Bazaar* lasting two days, had been successful in raising the money.

The matter of "Close Communion" had again been brought forward, but as the record states, "it was adjourned sine die."

One of the first tasks of Mr. Brown was to compose for, and get accepted by his Church, the following doctrinal statement:-

"Among the truths believed and held by us as a Church the following are entitled to special enumeration, viz.: The Divine inspiration of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and their absolute sufficiency as the only authorised guide in matters of religion. The existence of three equal persons in the Divine Essence, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Eternal and personal election to holiness here and eternal life hereafter. The original depravity and actual guilt of mankind. The atoning efficacy of the death of Christ. Free justification by his imputed righteousness. Particular redemption. The necessity and efficacy of the influences of the Holy Spirit in conversion and sanctification. The final perseverance of the Saints. The duty of all men to whom the Gospel is made known to believe and receive it. The obligation of believers to obey all the moral precepts of the word of God. The spirituality of the Kingdom of Christ, and His supreme and sole authority in the Church. The Resurrection of the Dead, both of the just and the unjust. The general judgment. The punishment of the ungodly, and the everlasting happiness of the righteous in the world to come."

In 1861<sup>13</sup> the Chapel was registered for the performance of the marriage ceremony and in the April, a Tract Society was formed. Soon after, the Library was overhauled and augmented "for the circulation of good literature amongst the members." The subscription was fixed at 6d. per quarter. In October a similar arrangement to that made at Vinehall was tried at the Mission Station at Whatlington. During the next 12 months a Missionary Working Party that did magnificent service for the "other sheep" of our Lord was started.

### **Fourteenth Pastor**

Mr. Brown resigned his charge on March 25th, 1863, after a ministry of two years and 10 months, and on May the 24th of the same year, the Rev. George Veals, of Braunston, near Rugby, Northamptonshire, took up the Pastorate. In 1864 the Envelope system of weekly offerings was instituted, and the next year Temperance work found a place in the engagements that occupied attention.

---

<sup>13</sup> On May 21st of this year the Rev. Paxton Hood preached here.

In the April of 1865, Sarah Knight, who had been a member of the Church for over 70 years, was transferred to Wellington Square, Hastings. The following year is memorable for the introduction of gas into the Chapel.

Owing to a Wesleyan Chapel being built at Whatlington the friends thought that any rivalry in so small a place would be unseemly, and they therefore sold their own Mission Station by public auction. (1869-75. After expenses were paid, "£9 7s. realised.)

At the end of October, 1872, the Rev. G. Veals resigned, after a ministry here of nine years and five months. His wife died May 17th, 1870, and his death is recorded December 3rd, 1883. He was buried in the ground belonging to his former flock, he having retained his membership with them.

### **Open membership**

In 1873 the practice of admitting unbaptised believers to the membership was made lawful by a new rule of the Church. At a Church Meeting held February 4th, and presided over by the Rev. W. Barker, of Hastings - "After a free conversation upon the religious and legal questions involved in the proceedings of the evening, in which extracts from the Trust Deeds were read, and other matters affecting to Church property were entered into, the following resolution was unanimously passed, and ordered to be entered upon the minutes of the Church book. That having regard to the spiritual interests of the Church, and it being known that several unbaptised believers connected with the congregation, and already accustomed to commune at the Lord's Table, are anxious to be more fully united with the Church in its efforts to carry on the cause of God it is hereby resolved to accede to their request. (This resolution was not formed until it was found that the Church had full power to make this alteration. The Trust Deed had been carefully examined and found not to contain any restrictions or regulations as to the terms of Communion, but only to guard the Church against errors in doctrine, inconsistent with the tenets of the "Particular Baptist.")".

Several attempts have been made since to alter this Church rule, but none has been successful. It is obvious that in a town of the size of Battle, there have always been those whom the Church desired to admit in the congregational method. In Mr. Howes' time so serious was the attempt made to close the membership that it caused the disruption of the Church. Again, in Mr. Screech's day, a resolution was passed blotting the 1873 rule out. But this, like the others, was of no worth, as whilst it was supposed to be in operation, members were admitted without the ordinance. Therefore, the Church remains what it has always been in practice, and what, since 1873, it has been lawfully, an "Open" or "Union" Church, admitting its members both by the "test of the waters," and the vote of their brethren.

### **Fifteenth Pastor**

About April of this year (1873), the Rev. George Wright, of Brayborne became Pastor, and under the new regime the pulpit was swept away and the present platform erected. The hymn books, also, were discarded, and copies of the "Psalms and Hymn" introduced. From the 22nd March to the 24th May, 1874, the building was closed for repairs and renovation (cost, £178 10s. 10½ d.), "during which time Divine Service was held in the Drill Hall each Lord's Day. On Sunday, May 24th, re-opening services were held in the chapel, Mr. Alway, of Mr. Spurgeon's College, preaching morning and evening. The Rev. W. Sampson, of Folkestone, preached in the afternoon of the 25th instant, after which service about 150 friends met for tea at little Park Farm. A public meeting in the chapel in the evening was addressed by the Revs. W. Barker, of

Hastings, W. Clark, of Ashford, and W. Sampson, of Folkestone. It was a very interesting and blessed meeting at the close of a very successful and happy day."

On June 24th, of the same year, Mr. Wright<sup>14</sup> resigned, having been Pastor here for the short time of one year and three months.

During the interregnum, the Rev. F. Angus, M.A., D.D., the predecessor at New Park Street of C.H. Spurgeon, the Secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, Principal of Regent's Park College, and Author of the "Bible Handbook," etc., occupied the pulpit several times whilst advising about the pastorate.

### **Sixteenth Pastor**

On April 25th, 1875, the Rev. John Howes, of Aylsham, Norfolk, commenced his long ministry of 20 years. During the opening year of Mr. Howes' ministry we find the first mention of the Band Of Hope, and also of a Mutual Improvement Society. More important still, we get a description of a Sunday School Anniversary. The Rev. J. Wilkins preached in the afternoon, and the tea was held in the Drill Hall, some 260 meeting together for this pleasant function on this Good Friday afternoon of 1876.

In 1880 the present Congregational Church was formed by 22 members of the Baptist Congregation, who the following year appointed the Rev. G. Foster Chapple, of Hackney College, minister of the Battle and Burwash causes.

The decade 1870-80 seems to have been the most prosperous one for the Church since the days of William Vidler. It was now nearing its centenary, but showed no-signs of weakness. Most of the farmers around the town were members, and some of the most wealthy of the inhabitants were found worshipping in "Zion". When G-. Barnes, C. and W. Mannington, and J. Jenner, formed its diaconate, it could well be called successful. In 1877 the collection for the B.M.S. was £12 9s. 8d., and that on Good Friday for the Sunday School was £14 8s. 1d.

The Netherfield Mission Station, the last of the branches of the Battle Church, had for some time been more of a burden than a blessing, therefore the members were quite ready to sell it to the Rev. Charles New, of Robertson Street Congregational Church, a business that was completed on February 3rd, 1886 (for the sum of £65). The money was reserved for the building of a new Sunday School, and this was "taken possession of by the Teachers and Children" on the next January 30th. It had been designed by the Pastor, and was built by Mr. John Thomas of Battle. The total cost was £103 4s. and it was opened free of debt. It occupies a position immediately at the back of the Chapel, and forms a very useful adjunct to the property of the Church.

The same year "Old Zion Chapel" was sold. Built in 1798 it had usefully served its purpose for 90 years. It was December when it was sold, and the following July (9th) the present Chapel was re-opened, after thorough renovation, the cost being defrayed by the proceeds of the sale just mentioned. The wine used at the Communion was changed for non-alcoholic, in 1892.

September 29th, 1895, was the last of Mr. Howes<sup>15</sup> ministry, the members as a parting gift handing over a legacy of £50 that had been left to the Church by a former member, Mr. William Collins, who had died in Brooklyn, Now York, U.S.A.

---

<sup>14</sup> Mr. Wright was then pastor at Melbourn, Gos: 1875-77, Walsworth Road, Hitchin, 1877-81, and from 1883 at Union Street, Kingston-on-Thames.

<sup>15</sup> Mr. Howes had served the Churches at Millwall 1869-72. Aylsham 1873-75. He retired to London at the close of his ministry.

### **Seventeenth Pastor**

In the November of 1895, the Rev. George Brooks Richardson accepted the charge of the Church for 12 months, not, however, removing into the district from Hastings. The Chapel was again renovated, the cost (£30) being raised by a Sale of Work. In March 1st, 1897, the Church was affiliated with the Baptist Union, and on April 8th, the Young People's Society of Christian Endeavour formed a branch here.

Mr. Richardson resigned after two years.<sup>16</sup>

### **Eighteenth Pastor**

Mr. Charles William Screech, of Regent's Park College, having been to preach here several times, the Church sent him the call in November, 1898. He continued the oversight until the next June, when he became their resident Minister. In the next year (March 14th) the spring meetings of the Sussex branch of the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association were held here.

It was this year also that the Church had to go to the considerable expense of placing buttresses around the building on the outside.

The Church Organ was bought in 1900, from the Baptist friends at Eastbourne.

Mr. Screech accepted a call to Ramsgate, and closed his ministry here on October 1st, 1902.<sup>17</sup> The P.S.A. that still flourishes exceedingly was started in 1899 by this minister.

### **Nineteenth Pastor**

In March, 1903, the Rev. John Reid Hewison consented to accept the oversight of the Church, but owing to severe illness was compelled to resign December 8th, 1905. In 1906, Mr. Hewison settled at Somersham, Hunts.

At a Special Church meeting, held May 7th, 1906, a Committee from the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association, consisting of the Revs. H.E. Barrell, of Eastbourne, C.E. Charlesworth, of Hastings, T. Hancocks, of Ramsgate, J.P. Morris, of Lewes, and G. Osborn, Esq., J.P. of St. Leonards, met in the Church. The result was an attempt to bring the two Churches, Congregational and Baptist, into one Union Church, "In the event of such an union being formed a strong Free Church would be the result, and the maintenance of a capable Pastor would no longer be a great burden." At the subsequent Conference held in the Congregational Church, on May 20th, the Rev. T. Hancocks moved, and the Rev. T.H. Cooper, M.A., of Hastings seconded, "that an united Conference having been held of both Churches and representatives of the Kent and Sussex Baptist Association and the Sussex Congregational Union, it was found after a free and frank discussion that for the time being a union of the two Churches was impossible."

### **Twentieth Pastor**

On August 4th, 1908, the Rev. F.W. Butt-Thompson, late of Bow, London, commenced his ministry. During 1908, the Chapel and Schoolroom were renovated, and the Organ

---

<sup>16</sup> Mr. Richardson was at Chadlington and Charlbury 1876-82. Eynsford 1882-92, and after leaving Battle, at Arlington 1900-1908. He was educated at the Metropolitan College.

<sup>17</sup> Mr. Screech went to Bllington, Ramsgate, 1902-5; and then to the Tabernacle, Peckham Rye, London.

put in thorough repair. This renovation of the Chapel was the sixth since it was built (1860, 1874? 1888, 1895, 1898).

The membership, which in the eighteenth century had reached 200, and which beginning again at 12 in 1794, during the nineteenth century had rarely been lower than 100 (it was 123 in 1879), dropped rapidly during the last few years, until 1907 it stood but 27. However, the glory has not all departed. Faithful souls are still faith-full. Long years of prayers are being answered. Congregations are increasing. The P.S.A. waxes stronger and stronger, and in January, 1909 the membership had risen to 44.

[end of text prepared by F.W. Butt-Thompson]



A Tent Mission, under the auspices of the Evangelisation Society of London, was commenced on 19th May 1909. The Church Minute Book reports a very poor attendance due, in part, to unusual cold and very wet weather. Thanksgiving offerings for that month amounted to £10 10s.

During 1910 pew rents were introduced for the first time to augment the income of the Church, the balance in the Treasurer's report for 1909 being only £1. The pew rent system died out after a few years. Later in the year there is a record of one of the members, Mr. H. Ticehurst, emigrating to New Zealand and of the Minister, the Rev. F.W. Butt-Thompson receiving a call to Bately, Yorkshire. Mr. Butt-Thompson had ministered in the Church for three years and had done much good work including the preparation of a Church History and the production of a pageant at Battle Abbey. At a Church Meeting, a resolution was passed accepting invitations from Chapel Park Road Baptist Church, St. Leonards and Wellington Square Baptist Church, Hastings to join in Fellowship with them. It was also agreed that the Church should be redecorated at a cost of £6 5s.

### **Twenty-First Pastor**

On 7th June, 1911, the Rev. P. Stanley of Eythorne, Kent was invited to supply the pulpit for a month with a view to the pastorate and at the end of the month's trial he was given an invitation which he accepted. At the Induction Service, no fewer than seven preachers had a few words to say and there is no record of the time at which the meeting finished. By the following year there were 70 scholars and 5 teachers in the Sunday School. At this time it was agreed to hand the Trust Deeds of the Church to the Baptist Union Corporation and to discontinue the practice of holding Church Business Meetings on Sundays.

In 1915 a Bible Class was formed with the object of holding the attention of the older Sunday School Scholars and this must have been successful since there is a record four years later of several Bible Class members having become Teachers. At this time there were several candidates applying for baptism but the pastor felt physically

unable to perform this due to his age and two years later, in 1921, he closed his ministry having faithfully served the Church for eleven years.

On 25th September 1921, the Church celebrated its Centenary and special services were conducted by the Revs. P. Lewis and F.W. Butt-Thompson to commemorate this milestone in the Church's history.

### **Twenty-Second Pastor**

Later the same year, the Rev. J. Gotham commenced a ministry which was to last two years after which he retired, due to age. During this time a delegate from the Church attended the World Baptist Congress in Stockholm.

### **Twenty-Third Pastor**

In 1925, the Rev. H.J. Dale responded to a call from the Church to become its Pastor at a salary of £100, plus half the balance remaining & the end of the year. Prayer Meetings were held on Monday evenings and Christian Endeavour on Thursdays. In 1927, the Church was again renovated and a platform was built in front of the pulpit with a Communion rail. This work was carried out by one of the Deacons, Mr. F. Grower and another member, Mr. T. Blackman, gave the Communion table and Chairs. Mr. Dale received a call from Lymington Baptist Church in 1928, and so closed his ministry in Battle.

After two and a half years without a Minister, Chapel Park Road Baptist Church, St. Leonards again offered to assist with the oversight. It was agreed that their Minister, The Rev. C. Toone should preach occasionally at Battle and chair the Church Meetings. Mr. Toone later left the Baptist cause and became a Unitarian Minister. It was during this time that the old coke stoves in the Church and Schoolroom were replaced by more modern gas fires.

### **Twenty-Fourth Pastor**

In 1952, a young student at Porth Bible College, Wales, a Mr. T.C. Weller, filled the pulpit on several Sundays, with a view to filling the vacant Pastorate. On 27th June, he became the Minister of the Church, the Church members having agreed to pay the stipend for the first year. The Principal of the College, the Rev. P. Jones conducted the ordination service and the Rev. K. Ridley-Chesterton of Worthing gave the charge to the Church. At this time there were 40 members on the roll. Later in the year, eleven people were baptised and, of these, seven were received into membership. The following year Women's Meetings and regular Sunday after-meetings were commenced.

In 1935, Mr. H. Gower, a Deacon and the Sunday School Superintendent, received recognition for 54 years service in the Church. It is also noted that an extensive renovation of the building was carried out at a cost of £300. The work included the replacing of gas lights with electricity, the installation of hot water central heating, and the decoration of the interior. Letters requesting support were sent to all former members who could be traced, and donations were received from as far afield as America. During the repairs, the Church worshipped in the old Unitarian Church, which has since been demolished.

According to the Minute Book, financial resources in the Church at this time were very low and Prayer Meetings were held every evening at 8.00 to seek Divine Guidance. During 1936 two members of the Church offered to clear the Church of debt if the others would undertake to provide for the running expenses, and two years later, on 31st May,



1938, the Ministry of the Rev. T.C. Weller at Battle was ended by mutual consent. It is also noted that during 1938, Mr. Ernest Brown, M.P., came to preach at Battle.

During 1940, the Church accepted an offer from Chapel Park Road, and Wellington Square Baptist Churches for their Ministers to serve as Moderators until such time as the Church should receive further guidance. Because of the War, the Schoolroom was taken over by the Army for the billeting of troops, since Battle had become front-line defence, and roads were picketed by soldiers. Services were now held morning and afternoon, because of the black-out in force, and identity cards had to be shown on going to and from Church. Many Church members served in the forces and others served at home as, Firewatchers, or First Aid and Canteen Helpers. The Military paid the Church - five shillings per week for the use of the Schoolroom. For the Church Anniversary, and Good Friday teas, special permits had to be obtained from the local food office and supplies were supplemented with food saved by members from their own rations.

In 1942, the Church railings were requisitioned for the war effort. During this time the membership dropped to 38. Church Meetings were held on Saturday afternoons and it is recorded in the minutes that the members gave the troops billeted in the hall, a Christmas present of a hamper of home-made cakes. Sunday services were often conducted in the Church by Padre Williams, the Church being nearly always full. The Rev. W.L. Grose of London also conducted many services, as a result of a request made by the Church to the Baptist Union for the assistance of a Pastor bombed out of London.

#### **Twenty-Fifth Pastor**

Toward the end of 1942, the Rev. H. Anderton, a retired Missionary, offered to take on the oversight of both the Baptist and Congregational Churches in Battle, and it was agreed that he should hold services in each building, on alternate Sundays, and that each Church should provide half his stipend. This arrangement continued until the end of the war, when Mr. Anderton retired, and the Churches reverted to their former pattern of independent worship.

For a year, Wellington Square Baptist Church took over the oversight, their minister, Rev. P. Barnard, taking over as Moderator.

#### **Twenty-Sixth Pastor**

In 1946, a retired Minister living in Hastings, the Rev. E. Kerr, offered his services as Pastor. Although he was 74, he felt he could perform a useful work at Battle. It was agreed that he should continue to live in Hastings, and be paid £100 per year. Wellington Square Baptist Church offered to pay £30 towards this. The following year 1947, marked the 50th Anniversary of Mr. Kerr's call to the Ministry, and special services were held in the Church to celebrate the occasion. The Church presented him with a Bible.

In 1949, the Church was again redecorated, and the following year extra heating was installed. In connection with the Kent and Sussex Mid-Century Crusade, four students from Spurgeon's College held a campaign in Battle for a week. Although attendance at the meetings was good, there was little lasting effect. A Young Life Campaign was started, and flourished until a youth club took over. Mr. E. Kerr concluded his ministry on 31st March, 1957, having served the Church faithfully during a most difficult time. He was 84.

The Church was again glad to accept the offer of the Minister of Wellington Square Baptist Church, the Rev. P. Mildred, to become Moderator. During 1957, it became

necessary to put down a concrete floor in the schoolroom, due to dry rot in the original timbers.

### **Twenty-Seventh Pastor**

On 3rd March, 1959, the Rev. H. Eramott of Fakenham, Norfolk, was called to the Pastorate. He had previously been a B.M.S. Missionary in China, and during his ministry gave many interesting lectures on China. The membership stood at 27 at the commencement of Mr. Emmott's ministry. During this time, the organ, now about 70 years old, was thoroughly renovated at a cost of £260, a member offering to pay for this work. After four years of steady and faithful ministry, Mr. Emmott felt, due to age, that the time had come to retire. He offered to stay until a new Minister could be found to fill the pastorate.

### **Twenty-Eighth Pastor**

In 1963, the Church sent a call to the Rev. S.W. Cowley of Lymington to become Pastor. He had previously preached in the Church whilst on holiday. He accepted, and commenced his ministry in January, 1963. The Induction Service was long remembered, it being a bitterly cold day and the electric central-heating having been taken away for repairs. The Church was heated by paraffin fires on this occasion. The electric central-heating boiler was subsequently replaced by oil-fired central-heating at a cost of £200. This sum was borrowed from the Kent and Sussex Building Fund to be repaid within ten years, and it says much for the Church that the minutes record that it was repaid in under two years, including interest.

In 1973, Mr. Cowley preached at the Armistice Service held in the Parish Church, in remembrance of the dead of the two World Wars. A Christmas Tree was also introduced to the Christmas Services during his ministry. During this time, two former Sunday School Scholars were ordained into the Baptist Ministry, these being the Rev. Frank Payne of Hawkhurst, and the Rev. Neil Nobbs of Little Stoke, Bristol.

In 1963, a Church magazine, The Messenger, was started, and 100 copies distributed monthly, and a legacy of £100 was left to the Church by a Mrs. Seagar. In 1968, Mr. Cowley closed his ministry after nearly six years, having reached the age of retirement. He and his wife continued to worship at Battle since his retirement, and ably filled the pulpit on many occasions after his retirement. For a short time, the Rev. H. Weston, late of Shoreditch Tabernacle, London, became Moderator.

### **Twenty-Ninth Pastor**

In 1969, Pastor Hunt of Sevenoaks was called to the Pastorate, Pastor Hunt being the father of the then Minister of Chapel Park Road Baptist Church, the Rev. Gordon Hunt. During his ministry, new Baptist Hymn Books and a book-case were given by members of the Ives family. Mrs. Ives had been in membership for four years. The following year the Church supported a Tent Mission in the Market Fields, arranged by the Counties Evangelists. A similar campaign was held in 1973, and whilst these did not build up the Church, they did arouse much interest in Battle. In 1970, the speaker at the Anniversary Services was Sir Cyril Black, and the Services were very well attended.

During 1971, the Church was again in need of redecoration, and this was done at a cost of £141. By this time the membership had risen to 45, the highest for many a year. For the first time, the Dean of Battle, the Rev. J. Darby, preached in the Baptist Church.

In 1975, the roofs of both the Church and Schoolroom were found to be in a very dangerous condition. Both roofs were re-slatted, and the woodwork replaced at the cost

of over £3,000. Services continued to be held whilst these repairs were carried out. During the 1975/76 winter, it was decided that, due to the very small congregation attending the evening services, one service only would, be held on Sundays, during the winter months, until such time as the membership increased.

At Easter 1976, Pastor Hunt closed his ministry at Battle, although he continued in membership and continued to fill the pulpit on many occasions. Mr. Cowley, the former Minister was asked to fill the Office of Moderator.

In June, 1976, a campaign was held in Battle by the Hastings-based village evangelism team, Mission for Christ. This campaign was held at the request of the Baptist Church. Generally speaking, attendances at the meetings were very poor, and the campaign can not be said to have had any great visible impact upon either the Church, or the town of Battle. One of the Mission for Christ administrative workers was asked to arrange a mid-week fellowship meeting, at the conclusion of the campaign, until such time as a pastor was called to the Church. He and his wife both, subsequently, joined the Church as members.

In 1977, major repairs were required in the Church, the floor having been found to be thoroughly rotten. A concrete floor was therefore put down, and faced with linoleum tiles. At the same time the interior of the Church was completely redecorated, the entrance-hall enlarged, and toilet facilities added. The finances for this work, approximately, £5,000, were raised by gifts and interest-free loans from members.

While the repairs and alterations were being carried out, services were held in the schoolroom. The work was completed by Saturday 4th June, on which occasion, a special service was held celebrating both the re-opening of the Church and the Silver Jubilee Anniversary of the Accession of Queen Elizabeth II. The guest speaker was the Rev. Bruce Hardy, Moderator of the Sussex Baptist Association.