

1824 – 1850



Joseph Preece (Pastor from 1839 to 1875)

Recorded events from September 1824 to 1850

1824

September 24th

A copy of a letter sent to the Right Reverend Lord Bishop of Salisbury and his Registrar records that: Richard Durand of Westbury, book-keeper certifies that 'a certain building or Meeting House situated at Cook's Stile in the Parish of Westbury, is intended forthwith to be used as a Place of Religious Worship by an assembly or congregation of Protestants'. This document being witnessed by Nathaniel Overbury, Samuel Chubb and William Taylor.

December 26th

List of Members who had been meeting at Cook's Stile Meeting House for about 2 years:

John & Rebecca Wilkins (John from Westbury Leigh Rebecca from Reading)

Samuel & M Chubb (Both from Bath)

William & Frances Taylor (Both from Bratton)

John & Ann Waddams (Both from Colchester)

Sarah Green (From Colchester)

Sarah Bigwood (From Bradley)

1825

November 3rd

On Thursday afternoon about ten people who had been attending worship at Cook's Stile Meeting House met together to form themselves into a Church, having obtained letters of 'dismissal' from their Churches. Mr Phillips of Penknapp commenced the service by prayer. Mr Walton of Back Street (now Emmanuel) Trowbridge made comments on the nature of a 'Christian Church' founded on the 2nd chapter of Ephesians. They were greatly indebted to Mr Anstie for his preaching the Word of God. (Mr Anstie of Trowbridge was the pastor at the commencement). The congregation increased and so decided to become a Church Fellowship, with the Bible as their guide, each person gave each other the right hand of fellowship, prayer was offered by Mr Gough of Westbury Leigh. Mr Mac Farlane of Bethesda told them of the duties of Church Members. The following statement of the circumstances relative to the formation of the Church was read:

'In the town of Westbury there have been residing for some time past, several members of Baptist Churches at a distance, destitute of a place in which they could meet together for the worship of God and the administration of His ordinances. They had not sufficient confidence in their own number or strength to erect a meeting house themselves, and were consequently under necessity of attending places belonging to other denominations in the town, or of going a distance on the Lord's day too great to allow of the attention due to the younger branches of their families. It is about two years since the place in which we now meet was built by individuals maintaining sentiments different from our own, and, as we believe, inconsistent with Divine truth. From unexpected circumstances this building was never employed for its original purpose, but became the property of a single individual; by him it was offered to us on lease; this offer we accepted, and subsequent events appear to have justified the step. We think no impartial observer can review the circumstances connected with this place, its first design, its present use, and the good already accomplished, without beholding the finger of God. We now rejoice that the building was not taken down, or appointed to any inferior purpose, as was once contemplated, for we trust it may be already deemed the birthplace of many souls.'

Below is an extract taken from 'Twenty Golden Candlesticks!' a History of Baptist Nonconformity in Western Wiltshire by William Doel, father of Rev. H G Doel Pastor of West End 1904 – 1909:

It will be seen from the above statement that the old Cook's Stile Chapel was not built by the Baptists. Two or three years before the formation of this Church a gentleman came to live at Eden Vale, Mr Hayter, who was reputed to have been a clergyman of the Church of England. He set apart a large room on his premises for worship, and many attended: but 'there was a secularity in his views,' and many called him 'A New Light'. Several embraced his views, and after he left the neighbourhood they removed to another part of town, and hired a large room in the yard of the Horse and Groom Inn, where they continued to meet and carry on the cause. One of their number possessing land at Cook's Stile, gave it, and here they erected the chapel in 1823. This was afterwards sold to the Baptist friends, who commenced worshipping there, as it appears it was never used by the 'New Lights'. It was opened for worship by the Baptists on December 26th, 1824. The 'New Lights' were not destined long to shine, as soon afterwards they were quite extinguished.

A copy of the Deeds dated 14th October 1830 record that William England of Westbury, (Clothworker), sold the Chapel and land at Cook's Stile to John Wilkins, (Draper), John Whaddams, (Clothworker), William Taylor, (Plumber), Thomas Reeves, (Blacksmith) all of Westbury and Joshua Whitaker of Bratton, trustees of the Church for the sum of £300, these deeds being witnessed by Robert Aitchison Baptist Minister Bratton. The Deeds also record that William England had purchased a larger parcel of land from William and John Matravers some years previously, built the Cook's Stile Meeting House and was now selling the Meeting House and part of the land purchased.

Extract from 'Westbury and Westbury Leigh. A Celebration of the Town and its People':

John and William Matravers were Quakers who developed the Angel Mill in the early 19th century. They took a keen interest in education. John left a bequest for educational purposes with which the Laverton Institute School was subsequently endowed. William had a schoolroom in his home, Westbury House, and it is appropriate that their most lasting achievement is commemorated in Matravers School.

November 7th

First two Deacons were appointed, John Waddams and John Wilkins.

1826

April 2nd

The first Baptismal Service at Bitham Spring conducted by Mr Anstie where seven people were baptised having previously been asked at a Church Meeting:

- Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?
- That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners?
- Do you depend for salvation on him alone?

October 1st

Four people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1827

February 18th

Mr Anstie tendered his resignation as their Pastor because of his family living away from the town. He expressed his love to them and requested that they remain strong in the Lord. The members then decided to ask Mr Cross of Bristol to continue preaching for 6 months, he agreed and earnestly hoped that both preacher and hearers would be blessed.

June 4th

After a Missionary Prayer Meeting the members agreed to hold Missionary Prayer Meetings on Friday Evenings and the usual Prayer Meetings on Monday Evenings.

June 10th

Eight people baptised at Bitham Spring.

September 30th

A letter was received from Mr Cross declining to continue Preaching because of a difference of opinion amongst the members.

1828

August

Five people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1829

January 18th

Mr Keen of Eye in Suffolk was asked to come to preach with a view to the Pastorate, 30 Members invited Mr Keen to be their Pastor.

March 28th

Mr Keen accepted to become Pastor.

Thirteen people baptised at Bitham Spring.

The congregation numbered 180.

1830

June 17th

A meeting was called where the resignation of Mr Keen was reported. The difficulties in the Church were discussed as there had been a lack of harmony amongst the members, it was decided by 37 members to dissolve the Church.

August 26th

Members met to discuss the reforming of the Church, the Church resumed as "Calvinistic Baptist Church".

At the above meeting, Rules of the Church were agreed, two of these being that:

- The Lord's Supper should be held on the first Lords day of the calendar month and that every member punctually attend.
- That a weekly prayer meeting be held and that every member view it as a privilege and duty to attend when circumstances permitted.

From this time until March 1839 various preachers led the worship and conducted baptisms. The rules for membership were strict with members being called upon to state reasons for absence from the Lord's Table and worship. Members were also dismissed for drunkenness, dishonesty and general bad conduct and language.

1831

August 14th

Six people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1832

October 21st

Seven people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1833

September 15th

Five people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1834

May

Nine people baptised at Bitham Spring, one candidate being Alfred Bigwood, a cripple.

August 24th

Seven people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1835

July

Five people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1839

March 17th

A Church meeting was held where 40 members agreed to ask Mr Joseph Preece of Woodchester, in the County of Gloucester, to become their Pastor, his stipend was to be £70 per annum.

June

Mr Preece commenced his Ministry.

September 22nd

Five people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1841

May 9th

Four people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1842

July 11th

Death of one of the founding Deacons, Mr Waddams aged 66.

1843

September 24th

Six people baptised at Bitham Spring.

1844

August 18th

Three people baptised at Bitham Spring.

Burials took place at Cook's Stile.

1845

September 7th

Six people baptised at Bitham Spring.

November 2nd

Three people baptised at Bitham Spring. Baptisms took place every year to 1849 at the Bitham Springs.

The burials of Sarah Atrims, Mary Doel and Sarah Hicketts took place at Cook's Stile.

1846

April 13th

Burial of Mrs Preece, wife of Pastor, took place at Cook's Stile (See plaque in the main Church). The Church at this time had its own dedicated ground for burials.

April 26th

Burial of Anne Watts took place at Cook's Stile.

1847

February

A collection was taken at the Lord's table for the starving in Ireland, this totalled three pounds one shilling. (£3-1s-0d).

1850

The Reeves family left the Church to go to Bratton.

West End Baptist Church
West End, Westbury, Wiltshire, BA13 3JG