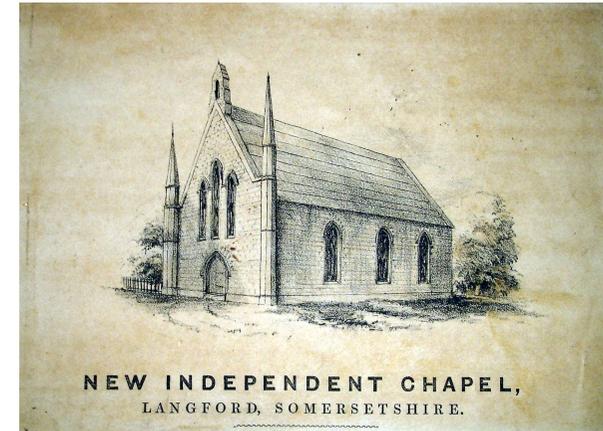


# A Brief History of Langford Chapel



*Langford Chapel now*



*Architect's visual - 1846*

**Third edition**

**2016**

Christians worshipping with larger churches. In 2006 a new extension to provide accessible facilities with a larger kitchen was built (again by Mr John Vowles). The partly finished building was pressed into service for the Church's 160th Anniversary with the Rev. Paul Mallard, then President of the FIEC, as speaker. Monthly coffee mornings started in 2008 and the *Langford Link* newsletter appeared. The desire to reach out to others with the good news led to a home visitation programme and a Church website. A roof overhaul, redecoration, new seat cushions and carpeting brought a fresh look. One of the Deacons, George Beacham, was asked to lead the work and he was inducted as Pastor in November 2009.

A work among children was missing and so a Holiday Bible Club took place in October 2011 with Clive Williams of the Open-Air Mission conducting this. This led to a few children forming the nucleus of a weekly Bible Club. More Holiday events followed and the children shared in annual Carol Services to the delight of parents and relatives but numbers fell and the club was suspended.



*Doris and John Munford*

*Jonathan and May Hunt*

Among those who joined the Church in this new century were John and Doris Munford and Jonathan and May Hunt. Both of the husbands were Called Home to be with the Lord in 2014 and Doris has since moved away. George and Glenys A'Court joined us in the last few years after moving into the district. There have again been difficult times as in the 1980s, yet we have been encouraged by helpers and by website contacts, including one who has testified to finding the Saviour. The monthly coffee mornings are also an opportunity for contact with people as is the visitation programme.

The world has changed since 1846 but the God who inspired those few pioneers is still the same. Our intention to continue "Holding forth the word of life" (Philippians 2 verse 16) relies on that fact.

## The early years

Records show a few people were meeting to worship God in the house of a Mrs Tavener (*or* Taverner) around 1838, and later in a shed as numbers grew. Some land was given, the foundation stone was laid in April 1846 and the building opened on 16th September. The architect was a newly-qualified Henry Stuckey, who later went to Australia and used the design there. Estimated cost was £500 when work started. Among the trustees were two familiar names: "W. D. and H. O. Wills"! (Smoking was not thought harmful then.)

Constitution as an Independent church came in 1849, membership consisting of "five males and seven females". William Phillips "commenced his pastoral labours in conjunction with Wrington", in 1862, when there were 14 members at Langford. Early burial records show that several people died young, which must have had quite an effect on the numbers.

The church was receiving help from an organisation known as the Bristol Itinerant Society but in 1865 some misunderstanding arose with them which led to the departure of Mr Phillips in October of that year. His last note in the minute book quotes Acts 20 verse 32 and then concludes with a loving prayer for the church - a gracious example to us all of how to avoid bitterness in such circumstances.

The building was not "solemnised for marriages" until 1868, by which time the membership had grown to around 30. The church took a dim view of "inconsistent behaviour" and with sorrow found it necessary to discipline members who caused concern. Perhaps that has something to say to us in these times when there is often a profession of Christian faith without a change in lifestyle.

It seems that in these early years the hymn singing had been unaccompanied. In 1874 it was decided to purchase a harmonium but according to the minutes of a meeting in 1875 there seems to have been a lack of harmony in choosing who should play it!

Some outbuildings were erected in 1876 and around that time there was more growth in membership. In December 1878 special evangelistic services were held. Attendance increased each night and we then read that on the Friday the "Chapel was pact (*sic*) in every part"! Several persons professed to be blessed by God. A new

Pastor, the Rev. David Griffiths, was recognised in 1881 and he combined this role with his responsibilities at Wrington. He remained in post until 1888.

Three days of Jubilee celebrations were held in 1896. One of the speakers was the Rev. W. Clarkson, who said that the benefit of such an “Evangelical Nonconformist church was that there would be one place where they would be sure that the Gospel of Jesus Christ would be heard in all its purity and simplicity”. We still try to be faithful to that principle today.

Renovations in 1902 cost over £154, a large sum then. Despite the difficulties of the First World War, the church was generous in supporting the wider work of the Lord and in maintaining its own activities. There were at least two weddings during this period.



*The Chapel in 1909 - from “Picture Postcards of the early 1900s - The Wrington Vale”, by kind permission of Mr Stan Croker*

### **Between the two World Wars**

By the 1920s it was thought necessary to add an extension but it was September 23rd 1936 before this was built and opened. Electric lighting was installed in 1921.

Among the well-known locals who joined the church were Mr and Mrs Elsworth in 1923. Their shop stood in front of Wistaria House

The desire of the church to reach young people resulted in another mission in 1980, with up to 30 attending meetings, led by a Mr Sarle of Scripture Union. David Davidson served as Pastor for a trial period in 1981. It is recorded that his ministry was a “great blessing” to the church. Ill-health caused Miss Brown to resign as Treasurer in 1983 after 30 years in the post.

### **Recent times**

The 1980s were difficult years for the fellowship. The Sunday School numbers declined and poor health affected some members. The chapel ceiling was a major concern but a small congregation continued faithfully and prayerfully. Those who have attended in recent years give thanks to God that they did not give up.

In August 1991 the state of the ceiling became so bad that it was found necessary to move the services into the schoolroom until repairs could be effected. Mr John Vowles of Redhill carried out the work and a thanksgiving service was held on June 13th in the following year. The theme was “The Lord hath done great things for us whereof we are glad” (Psalm 126 verse 3).

During the 1990s the church was given help by two retired ministers, the Rev. Kenneth Allen and the Rev. Peter Gentry. Mr Allen had to give up preaching some years ago and was Called Home in 2012. Mr Gentry continued to take occasional services until shortly before his sudden call to Higher Service in 2012. Other retired pastors and “lay” preachers were also a great blessing and gave much encouragement.

Between 1995 and the start of the new Millennium, there were additions to the congregation and some of these became members of the local church. However, not all have stayed and the Lord has called some other friends away to Glory, all of whom had had a long association with the Christians at Langford: Mrs Vera Lee (widow of the previously mentioned Reg); Mrs Mary Lee; Mr Martin Lee; Mr Ron Millard and then Mrs Betty Millard. “Whose faith follow”, (Hebrews 13 verse 7).

The membership remained small in the first five years of this 21st century, with fluctuating numbers in the congregation and many

Despite the 1938 event, there must have been a review as more centenary celebrations came in 1946, mainly centred on Easter. Anniversary events seem to have often been around that time of the year, rather than in September for the opening date. Perhaps this was because the foundation stone was laid in April 1846.

Records from this period show that there was a continued interest in missionary work and a welcome for choirs and others who brought sacred music to the church. More recently the Bristol Evangel Male Voice Choir has maintained the latter tradition and the church still encourages and supports overseas work.

The 1950s saw some spiritual advances; there was a thriving women's meeting and the still-active Sunday School resulted in some youngsters who attended becoming church members later on. Mr Gerald Underdown and his wife, who were living in Ladymead Lane, were said to have "worked untiringly" among these young people. A mid-week meeting was started. Among more material matters were the decisions to install mains water and electrical power in 1951 — thirty years after the lighting!



*A Sunday School outing to Weymouth in 1953*



*Some Sunday School children at the Chapel in the 1950s*

In 1957 evangelist Don Summers from Bristol led a mission at the church. He was supported by singers Reg and Grace Tomlinson and the blind pianist, Peter Jackson. Several people came to faith in Christ then including some who still live locally and attend the Chapel. One convert was Tom Harris, a former merchant seaman, who later on was well-known as a postman in the Wrington area.

Among many others blessed by the Lord through these special services was Ron Millard, who worked for Passey and Porter's Ford dealership in nearby Weston-Super-Mare. Reg and Grace were killed in sad circumstances in Canada in 1980. Don Summers went to be with his Lord in 2005.



*Peter Jackson*



*Reg and Grace Tomlinson were part of the "Gospel Witness" trio with Peter Jackson*



*Don Summers (by courtesy of Peter Summers)*

In the early 1960s there was much discussion as to the best form of Church government. By 1963 it was decided to continue to operate with Deacons. The interest among young people seems to have cooled by this time. Tom Harris had now taken up the work with them and stressed his concern for the children during a Church meeting. Towards the end of the decade there was a desire for a Pastor but the small numbers and finances were obstacles to this.

After a long time in membership of the Congregational Union, the church became independent again in 1968, and subsequently it became affiliated to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC). However, it took until 1973 for the trusteeship of the building to be transferred.

Despite the earlier decline in young people's work, things must have improved as there was discussion in 1972 about more space for the children and some pews were removed to provide this. The ever-busy Tom Harris was also involved in delivering Christian newspapers and still found time to help rebuild the boundary wall.

In 1973 the Secretary, Miss Milton, reported that it was getting difficult to find evangelical preachers for the pulpit. The building was re-registered for marriages in 1974 under its new Trust Deed.

A successful mission to children saw 35-50 attending each day and boosted the numbers in the Sunday School. By 1975 a further increase brought pressure for more space and teachers. That year the question of a Pastor was raised again but no resolution of the matter was reached. A retired minister, the Rev. Ernest Bacon, began regular preaching and also conducted a “Preacher’s Preparation Course”. His wife Audrey played the organ for several years. Both of them are now with the Lord.

The church lost the services of two stalwarts in 1979. David Tarling, the Sunday School Superintendent, left the district because of a business move. Then Reg Lee, described as a man “with a general sunny personality . . . of great spiritual faith, a believer in constant, incessant prayer and Bible study”, was Called Home to be with his Lord. He had been connected with the church for over 50 years. During the following year Miss Milton was obliged to relinquish her duties as Church Secretary after 31 years, owing to ill-health. She was succeeded by Mrs Mary Lee.



*Reg Lee*



*David and Jenny Tarling*



*Tom Harris*

Tom Harris told us a story from those times concerning an unusual solution to the problem of slipping slates, which had always troubled him since he first came in 1957. A man called Cyril Gabell offered to replace the rusty nails on the roof with brass screws — for just £100! With a gang of helpers, he completed this mammoth task in less than a day. The schoolroom extension was not included, and still had the problem, despite a coating being applied later on. That the price was reasonable was clear afterwards, when Cyrill ruefully admitted to losing money on the venture. (At a roof overhaul more recently, removing those screws caused problems.)

in Langford Road and Horace Elsworth was the Church Treasurer for many years until his retirement in 1955. One of their granddaughters, Christine, is currently the Church Secretary. During a mission in 1929, their daughter Mary came to faith in Christ, recording this blessing in a pocket-sized John’s Gospel. She married Martin Lee in 1937; he was a gardener at Barley Wood before Army service in the Second World War. After the war he worked with his brother Reg in a private hire and market garden business. The family were all members of the church over a number of years.



*The old pews and decor*



*A much younger Horace Elsworth, pictured in 1908*



*Martin Lee at work in Barley Wood gardens*

In 1938 replacement pews were installed as a memorial gift, and this is recorded on a plaque near the pulpit. The change to a central aisle took place at this time. The same seating is still in use, though now with cushions! Centenary meetings were held in the same year; perhaps the 1838 house meeting was then seen as the start of the work, though the chapel had not been built until 1846.

### **The post-war years**

After WW2 the church continued its association with the chapel at Wrington and from 1945 shared the services of a new minister, the Rev. Clifford W. Carver, until 1949 when he moved to Tunbridge Wells. The Rev. Erwyn Daniel replaced him in 1950.

**Postscript**

We have been asked why the Church was called Langford Evangelical Church after 1970 rather than Langford Chapel. The building was originally named Langford Chapel but later it was known as Langford Congregational Church after joining the then Congregational Union denomination. After leaving that group it was renamed Langford Evangelical Church. Originally “church” meant the people who worshipped together rather than the building, but that distinction has largely been lost and the word now tends to be used in both ways.

The term “Evangelical” means to believe that the Bible is God’s unchanging word and to proclaim Jesus as God’s Eternal Son and the only Saviour – because He paid the penalty for our sin on the Cross and then rose again. Jesus said that He is the only way to God (John Chapter 14 verse 6) and He taught that to know Him is to have eternal life (John Chapter 17 verse 3).

However, the local signs still say Langford Chapel and we recognise this may cause confusion when people are trying to find us. So for our 170th Anniversary we have been shifting the emphasis and reviving the original name. (For legal reasons we cannot change the official name of “Langford Evangelical Church” on some documents but we can use “Langford Chapel” for most purposes.)

First produced for the 160th Anniversary in 2006,  
this booklet was reprinted in 2007 and 2008.  
A revised and updated edition was published in 2013.  
This further updated edition was published  
in 2016 for the 170th Anniversary.

Printed and published by Langford Evangelical Church  
Blackmoor, Lower Langford, North Somerset, England

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Also available in pdf format on our website:  
[www.langfordevangelicalchurch.org](http://www.langfordevangelicalchurch.org)

**Acknowledgments**

Our thanks to Neil and Pamela Body from Australia for their information concerning the architect (Neil Body is a descendant of Henry Stuckey), and to Stan Croker and Peter Summers for kind permission to use their photographs, also acknowledged *in situ*.

