

History



Photograph courtesy of [Ben Jackman](#), to whom we are extremely grateful. Approximate date 1905-1915

Non-conformity may be said to have begun in Oakham when the Act of Uniformity was passed in 1662. This required every clergyman to agree to the 39 articles, which can be found in the Book of Common Prayer. Some 2,000 of them refused and were ejected from their 'livings'. They were the first Dissenters and were subject to many discriminatory measures against them. At some date prior to 1769 'a door was opened for preaching the Gospel'. A few people who had previously attended the Established Church began to meet at a friend's house for social prayer and desired to hear the Word of Life and that perishing sinners around them should have the Gospel preached to them, invited several neighbouring ministers to come and speak to them. The response to the ensuing preaching was fierce violent opposition. One visiting minister was Rev. Robert Hall senior of Arnesby, Leicestershire, and his visit caused pronounced opposition. A high church lady living nearby 'either threw up her window or opened her door and abused everyone who went into the Meeting House'• . One Mr. W. Sharpe, a cabinetmaker and previously leader of the Parish Church Choir, took an earnest part in this early movement. He was threatened with the loss of one of his best customers unless he returned to the Parish Church. Sharpe stood his ground making it clear it was more important to him to worship as he thought right and if he lost the custom, so be it. However the customer said he had more respect for Sharpe than before, apologised and assured him he would not lose his custom. Despite all of the opposition the few members persevered and were joined by others. Several people in the town and villages were converted to Christianity. The meeting place, a private house, became too small and by 1770 or 1771 it was necessary to erect a House of God. This stirred up a new wave of fierce opposition. The Adversary of God and man was remarkably active and did all he could to oppose it and it seemed unlikely anyone would sell them land. Nevertheless a deal was done privately, which when known caused more protests with opponents declaring that they would have given anything to prevent the Dissenters having it. Townspeople let it be known that they would not employ anyone who worked on the building. It was threatened that whatever was built in the day would be knocked down at night. Workmen had to be brought in from a distance but despite all the opposition and threats it was eventually finished. Two applications to register the building as a place of worship were refused but finally a mandamus (writ) was

obtained compelling the magistrate to grant it without further delay. On the 5th November 1772, 22 people signed a solemn covenant to walk together as a distinct and visible Church of Christ and it is this date that is remembered as being the church's birthday.

Even after the establishment of the building as a place of worship opposition did not cease. The occasion of the first burial in the graveyard (now our Memorial Garden) was marked by protests and a mob gathered, making such an uproar nothing said at the service could be heard. In 1792 the third Pastor, Abraham Greenwood, was present at a meeting in the parlour of Widow Wallis' cottage when £13.2s.6d. (13 pounds, 2 shillings and 6 pence which is approximately £1,180 today) was collected in a snuff box (Oakham's contribution was two Guineas (£2.2s. which is approximately £188 today). This was the first modern missionary collection and led to the formation of the Baptist Missionary Society. Widow Wallis' 'Cottage' is still there, at Kettering, Northamptonshire, but much larger than most of us would describe as a cottage. Later, John Fountain, who had been converted at Oakham, became the first missionary to join William Carey at Serampore, India. Mary Tidd, a member of this church formed a friendship with John Fountain and later the church sent her out to join John, whom she married. Sadly he died soon afterwards and Mary married again, on the 10th May 1802, this time to Rev. William Ward who had traveled out to India with her.

In the spring of 1843, 13 members were 'dismissed' to form a church at Belton-in-Rutland. It was in the ministry of Rev. J. Jenkson (1849-1864) that the present chapel at Langham, Rutland, was erected. On the 29th August 1861 three young friends desired to carry the Gospel to Braunston-in-Rutland and a month later it was recorded that the Lord's blessing seemed to be attending the efforts there. Subsequently a Chapel was erected at which a service was held every Sunday evening. Sadly this Chapel closed some time ago as has quite recently, the one at Belton-in-Rutland.

By 1830 the church needed to be enlarged and in 1870 it was thoroughly restored at a cost of £500 (approximately £32,000 today). The Schoolrooms were added in 1894. Over the years the church has flourished, but at the end of the 1960's its existence was threatened as membership had dropped to a very few but devoted and faithful people. Dry and wet rot were rampant and there was a compulsory purchase order hanging over the church. In the 1970's, the threatened compulsory purchase order had lapsed and the Lord answered the prayers of the faithful few, moving people into the church with the skills and determination to rectify the situation. Under the inspiration and leadership of Arthur Kelsall the dry rot was ripped out, the walls treated and other necessary improvements carried out with much of the work being done by members of the Fellowship. Later, further improvements were undertaken and completed by the early 1990's. By 1997 the building again was insufficient for the number of people and activities needing to use them. In addition, government legislation required facilities for disabled people and toilets and catering facilities to be brought up to the new standard. A further scheme was undertaken involving the removal of the old pipe organ and use of the space for extra rooms and it was completed on the 14th September 2002. The Christian witness from this church goes on as it seeks to bring Christ's Gospel to the people of this town and area.

Ministers of Oakham Baptist Church

Since 5th November 1772

Ministers Name	Year From Year To	
William Smith	1773	1782
John Sharp	1782	1786
Abraham Greenwood	1786	1796
Edward Mabbutt	1796	1798
John Jarman	1798	1804
----- Douglas	1804	1806
M. Wheeler (supply preacher)	1806	1807
John Miller	1808	1820
Joseph Belcher	1821	1822
John Paul	1822	1824
John Rowse	1824	1826

John Hinners	1828	1836
Charles Crate	1837	1838
John Turland Brown	1839	1843
Charles Green (Died 7/11/1844)	1844	1844
T. Bumpus	1846	1848
John Jenkinson	1849	1864
W. Penfield Cope	1865	1871
William Sutton	1871	1879
Charles Williams	1880	1885
Alexander Pigott	1888	1891
Henry J. Suter	1892	1907
Howard T. N. Ussher	1907	1913
Samuel P. Shipley	1914	1923
George Sage	1923	1928
John W. Cannings	1929	1933
Frank Houghtby	1934	1937
Thomas Lloyd Morgan	1938	1944
David Glyn Davies	1944	1949
Garwood Silvester Tydeman	1950	1951
Robert Henry Brennan	1952	1958
Sister Nancy Quantrill	1959	1967
<i>No Ministerial Oversight</i>	1967	1977
Arthur Thomas (John) Swaffield	1977	1984
Donald Samuel Page	1984	1992
Peter Bolton	1995	2004
Robert G. Beardsley	2006	2011
Stephen Barnwell	2013	2019
Tom Bowring	2021	Present