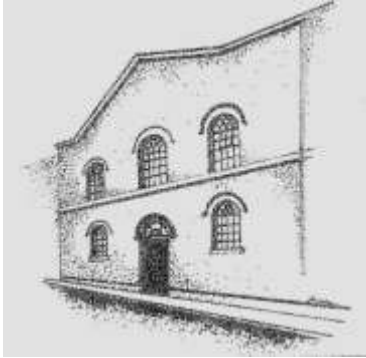


# Kidderminster Baptist Church 1808 - 2008



Silver Street, 1808 - 1868



Church Street, 1868 - 1971



Franche Road, 1971 - 2008

**200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**  
**Souvenir History Booklet**

## **References within this booklet.**

### **1. A Centenary Souvenir.**

A History of The Baptist Church in Kidderminster (1808 – 1908).  
Rev. J. H. Morley, 1908.

### **2. 1808 – 1958.**

Church Street Baptist Church.  
Rev. Colin Furse, 1958.

### **3. Kidderminster Baptist Church**

A Celebration to commemorate Twenty One Years` Witness in  
Franche, Kidderminster.

Mr. John Darlington, 1992

### **4. Double Celebration**

Brothers marking their centenary are UK's oldest identical twins.  
The Baptist Times, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2007

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## **Kidderminster Baptist Church Diaconate 2008**

Minister-in-Training: Mr Simon P. Gudger

Church Secretary: Mr Roger M. Wood

Church Treasurer: Mr Chris Lane

Deacon: Mrs Marion Appleby  
& *pastoral care co-ordinator*

Deacon: Mrs Susan Lane  
& *fabric co-ordinator*

# **A history of Kidderminster Baptist Church written for the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 2008**

*written and produced by Roger M. Wood*

Since others before us have put together their story of the history of the work of the Holy Spirit in the community of Jesus Christ meeting in the Baptist Church in Kidderminster (1,2,3), it is relevant for us, on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of that work to bring it up to date and to record what God has done in the meantime.

## **The Early Years**

As has been recorded previously (1, 2), the Baptist community in this area of Worcestershire started in 1649. In this year Bewdley Baptist was founded by a Church of England minister, Rev. S. Tombes. This church grew and people came from a wide area. Since travel was slower and more difficult than nowadays, and since several people who lived in Kidderminster attended the Bewdley church, it soon became desirable that a meeting should take place in Kidderminster. A few of these, together with some from the Countess of Huntingdon Connection church which had closed, started meeting in the house of Thomas Price. In 1807 Thomas Griffin moved to Kidderminster from Bewdley and began to lead this group and when 4 people were baptised in 1808 they formed the nucleus of a new church. This met in the house of Catherine Best. Others being seconded to the church from Bewdley, they outgrew the space available and moved to the house of John Kimberline. In 1811 a site on the corner of Union Street and Silver Street was given to the church. Despite the difficulties of finance with the total cost of the building was £200, the new church building was opened in 1813 with Thomas Griffin as its minister receiving an annual stipend of £20.

In 1817 Thomas Griffin emigrated to America on account of his wife's health. After this the church was led successively by:-

S. R. Allom, 1818 – 1819, who supplemented his income by keeping a boarding school.

William Downes, 1820 – 1823, who ran a general ironmongers shop in Blackwell Street.

Rev. Henry Smith, 1826 – 1836, during whose ministry the church building was extended, at a cost of £600, as the church membership had grown to 104 baptised members.

Rev. John Goddard Stevens, 1836 – 1840, who led a steady ministry and managed to write off the debt on the church building.

Rev. John Mills, 1841 – 1853, who saw the church settle at about 122 members.

After Rev. Mills had resigned in 1853 there was an interregnum of some years and in 1856, Rev. Wright of Regents Park Baptist College led the church for a year.

Rev. John Henry Jones led the church from 1857 – 1861 but by the time of his resignation the membership had dropped to 88. However by the time Rev. Thomas Fisk, fresh from Bristol Baptist College, was called to the pastorate the membership had dropped to 52, with sometimes only one member in the congregation at the evening service.

## **Church Growth**

The church grew under Rev. Fisk's leadership and the site at Silver Street became too constricted for the church's activities. The site at Church Street was bought from Mr. Fawcett for £425 in 1865 and a foundation stone was laid in 1867. After much sacrificial giving the new church was opened in 1868 at a total cost of £2694. The site at Silver Street was kept as a mission station for many years. The town's population had grown to about 5,000 in 1867.

It is hard to realise in these days of high inflation and increasing rising prices, how much sacrificial giving went into

the provision of this church building. The debt on the church building was not paid off until 1876. During this time the church existed on a shoe string, Thomas Fisk was not being paid his full stipend for many years at a time. However the church was growing fast during these years, 103 members in 1866, 206 members in 1873, and up to a peak membership of 288 members in 1896.

In 1874 a nucleus of members, with the blessing of the church in Kidderminster, went and formed Stourport Baptist, under the leadership of Rev. Richard Evans. Expansion on the home front was also occurring. In 1874 the number on the Sunday School roll was 400 with another 90 at the Silver Street Mission. This stretched the premises so much that in 1877 the purchase of Arch Hill School was proposed. This was finally opened in 1882, having cost £2662. In addition to this, Mr. J. R. Harvey, one of the deacons at Church Street, having bought land in Lorne Road, both gave it to the church as a mission outreach centre and paid for building costs of £600. Milton Hall, as it was then titled, was opened in 1890 under first Mr. Richardson, then Rev. L. T. Harry, also assistant minister at Church Street. There were difficulties in the relationship between the two leaderships and Milton Hall finally became a separate church under Rev. W. A. Benton in 1898.

After Thomas Fisk died in 1903, Rev. Henry John Morley was called, 1904 – 1913. By this time the effect of the church on the life of the town was marked; one tangible fact being that there was a regular P.S.A. (Pleasant Sunday Afternoon) meeting. In 1904 this meeting/concert recorded 750 male members and the attendance often exceeded 1000 people. There was a great celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the church in 1908 and Rev. Morley wrote a Centenary Souvenir History of the church. Several members of the congregation went into the ministry during these years - George Webb, Thomas Woodhouse and C.H. Watkins. Mrs. Millman went out to the Congo as a missionary but unfortunately died during the voyage.

The church secretary during these years was Mr. John Andrews and the treasurer, Mr. Jessie Bowdler. As a point of reference it was estimated in 1900 that a weekly offertory of £8 per week was necessary to keep a church with about 300 congregation running smoothly. Although the membership was fairly stable at around 250 the church was not growing due to a movement of population away from the centre of the town, particularly into estates built on the NW of the town.

## **The War Years and Beyond**

After Rev Morley, Rev. Ralph O. Price, 1914 – 1916, led the church followed by Rev. Frederick R. Conibear, 1917 – 1927. Rev. Conibear saw the church through the years of the Great War with Mr. Arthur Bale as secretary and Mr. Sam Wanklin as treasurer to the church during this time.

In the years between the wars Rev. Frederick Hobbs, 1928 – 1935, was minister and Sam Wanklin became secretary, in addition to being treasurer, appointments he held until his death in 1953. When Rev. Hobbs married in 1930, the church purchased a house in Chester Road as a manse. The records show that even more estates were now being built on the outskirts of the town at Sutton Farm and Foley Park.

Rev. Llewellyn. S. Lewis, 1936 - 1945, led the church through the period of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War but accepted the pastorate at Kings Heath, Birmingham, immediately it finished. The government of the day requisitioned the Arch Hill School in 1938 for war work and the income received from it was a life-saver as the war took its toll of the members on the church.

After the war, the church recommenced under Rev. Wilfred Driskell, 1946 – 1952. He inherited a nominal membership of 220 people but by the time the membership list was examined closely, many people having emigrated without transferring membership to their new church overseas, it proved to be down to 166 by the time that Rev. Colin Furse, 1954 – 1960, was

inducted. During this period the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the church was celebrated (2). During the interregnum which followed Rev. Furse's resignation in 1960 the church was totally refurbished, at a cost of £1,000.

Rev. Robert Hewitt pastored the church from 1961 until his death in 1968 following a car accident, which left the members in a state of shock. One notable incident in the life of the church in 1964, was the commissioning and valediction of Miss Anne J. Bound to serve with the Baptist Missionary Society in the Kond Hills, India.

### **Moving to Franche**

One of the last things Robert Hewitt did before his tragic accident was to carry the church through the decision to move the church out of the centre of the town. During his years in office, the premises at Church Street had become increasingly unusable and the agonising decision had to be made whether to rebuild or to move to an area of the town where there was little Christian work or witness. Finally, in 1970, the decision was made to acquire a site outside the town centre and to move the church to Franche. For a period the church met in St. Mary's Church Chantry and the Sunday School met in the Broad Street Day-School premises. During the interregnum the task of leading the church fell upon the diaconate led by the secretary, Mr. John Flack. Mr. Flack was a well known businessman in the town and besides being church secretary at Church Street was also Lay Pastor at Stourport for six years and of Bewdley Baptist for a further two years.

Rev. Rodney Firmin, an ex-missionary in Jamaica, was then called to lead the church in the new area. He served the church at Franche from 1971 – 1975. On May 8<sup>th</sup> 1971 the new church building at Franche Road was formally opened by Mrs. R. B. Hewitt in the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress of Kidderminster. A fairly major drop in the church membership at

this time came about when the church meeting decided to put the names of members, who were not living in the district, but who wanted to continue their association with the church, on a separate Associate membership list. Mr. Bert Wilson was appointed secretary in 1974 and served in this capacity until 2004.

Following the departure of Rev. Firmin, a joint pastorate was entered into with Stourport Baptist and Rev. Eric L. Giles, 1977 – 1985, was appointed and lived in the manse at Stourport.

It is instructive to note that the site next to the church was originally scheduled to become a joint Baptist/Anglican (St. Barnabas) youth centre. For some reason this never came about and it was eventually acquired by the Wyre Forest District Council as a hostel for homeless women. However it was soon recognised that our multi-purpose building was too small for the needs of the church and a project was launched which resulted in the addition of a large hall as an extension to the main building. This was designed by Mr. Donald Sey, who then oversaw the construction of the hall, ably helped by Mr. Chris Kacsor and other members of the congregation. The hall was opened on February 6<sup>th</sup> 1982 by Mr. John Flack.

The finances of the church were tightly stretched during this period and it was decided, on the retirement of Rev. Giles, to call a non-ministerial pastor for the time being. Mr. John Darlington M.B.E. was inducted in 1986 and he served until 1993. The 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the opening of the church building in Franche Road was celebrated in 1992 and a third booklet, outlining the history of the church was printed to mark the occasion (3). One notable feature of John's ministry was to leaflet the whole neighbourhood. John also raised significant money for the church to pay some of the debt on the new hall, by holding a sponsored organ recital in the church.

In 1994 Rev. Peter Dwyer was called as a part time minister and, after celebrating 37 years in the Baptist ministry in 2001

retired early in 2002. Peter was also secretary of both the Worcestershire Baptist Association and of the Wyre Forest Group of churches. During this period the Wyre Forest churches met socially and the evening services in August were held at the five churches in rotation. A grant from the Home Mission Fund enabled the enlargement and complete restructuring of the kitchen. This allowed a luncheon club to be started which drew in participants from other churches and non-church people alike. At the end of Rev. Dwyer's term of office the church decided to sell the manse in Franche Road as it was not foreseen that it would be used again. The manse was therefore sold but, as it was held by the BU as trustees, the money was kept in trust by the BU until it was needed for a new manse or for a capital project. Incidentally this followed the common practice of selling the manse when a pastor left and buying a new one when a new pastor was appointed. This was acceptable when house prices were stable but not in times of high inflation.

## **The Recent Years**

Mr. John Williams, who had been a supplementary minister since 1981, was called to be part time pastor in 2003. The main thrust of John's leadership was to invigorate the church to reach out to the neighbourhood. The diaconate realised that if the church did not reach out and grow it would diminish to an unsustainable level due to the age of the remaining membership. Over two thirds of the then membership of 30 were over 70 years of age. In fact the church membership had fallen by 10 members in 4 years solely due to death. Two members with long histories of involvement in the church reached their centuries, Mrs. Jessie Grainger in 2006 and Mr. John Flack in 2007(4). Jessie passed away in 2007 and John in 2008, just three weeks before the main anniversary celebration services.

The church, when challenged, threw its energies into reaching out and making the church open and attractive to non-members. An internal audit was carried out and this included a drastic

change and redecoration to the sanctuary, a disabled toilet block and a new roof to the church hall. In addition, at first in parallel with the church magazine "Outreach", a separate magazine "Crosstalk" was launched with the express purpose of reaching non-church attendees. This was first circulated to the inhabitants of Marlpool Place and to the various organisations which used the church halls.

The luncheon club, started by Rev. Dwyer, had to close as the organisers got older, and some indeed died. Mrs. Jennifer Williams started up a new programme, **Come And Meet Each Other**. These lunches were open to all and a number of people round the periphery of the church came on a regular basis.

As the result of a diaconate "away-day" led by Rev. Kerry Birch (Rainbow Hill and HEBA/Bristol Baptist College link) the church was challenged to investigate the practicality of calling a "church-based" student from Bristol Baptist College to work alongside John Williams. After discussion with Rev. Ken Stewart of Bristol Baptist College and with the HEBA Home Mission fund representatives it was decided to go ahead with this. After much heart searching as to the financial implications of this move the church invited Mr. Simon Gudger to come as a church-based Minister-in-Training.

The financial considerations of any large scale change can be intimidating and the church had to face up to the expense of paying and supporting Simon for the 4-year college course plus accommodation. Although there was the nest egg from the sale of the previous manse and a considerable sum put by towards the future running of the church the membership still had to find £50,000 to purchase a suitable manse. The church membership responded well though to the appeal, raising enough money to purchase a house on Chestnut Grove and, at the time of writing now has a residual debt of only £8,500.

Although it had been hoped that Simon and John would work together in tandem throughout Simon's college course, John decided to retire in early 2007, after 26 years as a Supplementary minister, leaving Simon to continue alone.

The church in the year that followed further increased its efforts to both reach out into the community and also create a welcoming environment with the sanctuary. The addition of a computer and data projector in the church enabled new media to be used within the services, and the setting up of a new church website raised the potential number of people coming into contact with the church.

Another new initiative was the creation by Mrs. Louise Gudger and Mrs. Nicci Lane, of "TotsRock", a musical-based Toddler group. Initial planning was for 12 children plus adults, however within a few weeks the number attending had grown to 32 children and a limit had to be introduced to ensure that it did not outdo the facilities. As a result of this group, the church was able to hold a special children's nativity service at Christmas 2007. This was extremely popular with families and also attracted children and parents from the independent "Jack and Jill" pre-school. This organisation, meeting in the hall on weekday mornings, had recently celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Alpha Courses were also introduced to the church in the Autumn of 2007 and Spring of 2008. A number of existing church attendees, along with newer people came along to this 10 week course sharing a meal together and discussing some of the key elements of the Christian faith.

As a result of these Alpha courses, the existing weekly prayer meeting and Bible study were phased out, and two new housegroups created, one of which was specifically for those completing the Alpha course. Both housegroups proved popular, with relationships deepening and experience of God becoming more prevalent. The long-standing Monday fellowship group also continued, although numbers fluctuated

each meeting with members becoming older. Mrs. Bernice Darlington returned to help the church lead this group.

The decision was also taken to combine the existing “Outreach” and “Crosstalk” magazines, and produce one community magazine with articles and information, not just for the church members, but also to raise interest within the local community. “Crosstalk” became the sole magazine of the church and began to be professionally printed bi-monthly and distributed to over 600 local houses along with all organisation running within the church. The door-to-door visitation around Marlpool Place with the magazine, first introduced under John Williams, also continued.

It is encouraging to see God still using this church even with such a small congregation. Each person throughout the years has been an important cog in God’s mission within this church. Whether numerically large or small, God has still remained faithful and has transformed thousands of lives through the work of the people that he has gathered together at any particular time. In 2008, we are privileged to be included in the latest part of God’s 200 year work to date in this church. The Holy Spirit is gathering momentum and we see small signs that He is stirring up His people once again to bring more of God’s love to those in need.

“The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.”

*Isaiah 58:11-12*

# A list of all Pastors & Ministers 1808 - 2008

**Thomas Griffin**, Pastor 1808-1817  
Membership in 1808, 4  
Church in Silver St. opened in 1813  
Est. membership in 1818, 50

**S.R.Allom**, Pastor 1818-1819  
Est. membership in 1818, 50

**William Downs**, Pastor 1820-1823  
Est. membership, 50

**Rev. Henry Smith**, Pastor 1826-1836  
Membership in 1836, 104

There are no photographs of these early pastors.



**Rev. John Goddard Stephens**, Pastor 1836-1841  
Est. membership in 1841, 125



**Rev. John Mills**, Pastor 1841-1856  
Membership in 1856, 110  
Died 1874

**Rev. William Wright**,  
Pastor 1856-1857

**Rev. John Henry Jones**,  
Pastor 1857-1861  
Membership in 1862, 52



**Rev. Thomas Fisk**, Pastor 1862-1903  
Church St. opened in 1868  
Membership in 1870, 186  
Stourport Baptist founded in 1874  
Arch Street Schools opened in 1882  
Milton Hall Baptist founded in 1890  
Membership in 1896, 288  
Died 1903

**Rev. Henry John Morley**, Pastor 1904-1914  
Membership in 1904, 205  
100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, 1908  
Membership in 1909, 243



**Rev. Ralph O. Price**, Pastor 1914-1916

**Rev. Frederick R. Conibear**, Pastor 1917-1927



**Rev. Frederick Hobbs**, Pastor 1928-1936  
Membership in 1930, 203

**Rev. Llewellyn S. Lewis**, Pastor 1936-1945  
Membership in 1940, 222



**Rev. Wilfred Driskell**, Pastor 1946-1952

**Rev. Colin Furse**, Pastor 1954-1961  
150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, 1958  
Membership in 1960, 97





**Rev. Robert Brydges Hewitt**, Pastor 1961-1968  
Died 1968

**Rev. Rodney Firmin**, Pastor 1971-1977  
Membership in 1975, 81



**Rev. Eric L. Giles**, Pastor 1977-1985

**John Darlington**, Pastor 1986-1994  
21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of Franche Rd, 1992



**Rev. Peter Dwyer**, Pastor 1994-2001  
Membership in 2000, 30

**John R. Williams**, Pastor 2002-2007



**Simon P. Gudger**, Minister-in-Training since 2006  
200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, 2008  
Membership in 2008, 22

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