

A  
SHORT HISTORY  
OF  
MEREDITH ROAD  
BAPTIST CHURCH  
COVENTRY

1822 - 1972

# MEREDITH ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH

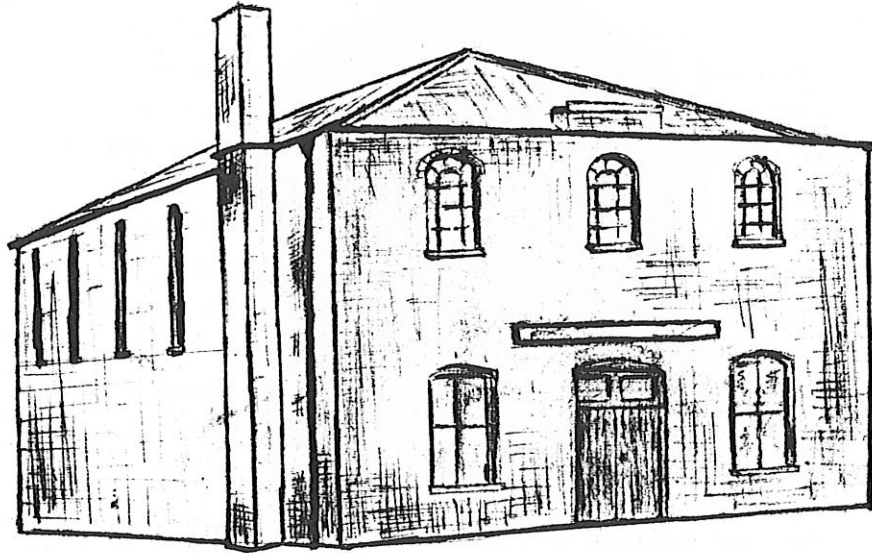
## FOUNDATIONS

The year 1822, the date 25th August in that year, the place, Bell Court, Much Park Street, Coventry, and nine people in a room there, meeting together to worship God and to form a Church of Jesus Christ, to be brought into the membership of the General Baptist New Connexion.

## THE FIRST MOVE IN THE CHURCH'S PILGRIMAGE

The numbers attending increased and on 24th April 1825 they commenced services in Whitefriars Lane, Coventry, in a Chapel they had built. Owing to the nature of the district and the smallness of the Chapel, the work was maintained with difficulty over a number of years, until the congregation under the ministry of the Rev. Henry Cross decided to purchase land in a main street of the city, laid the Foundation Stone of a chapel there on 8th September 1868 and then moved with great gladness and thanks to Almighty God, into Gosford Street Baptist Chapel on 4th May 1869.

The work carried on there (the site of which is now occupied by part of the College of Art and Design) grew steadily, and with the increase in the population of the city and in the district, the pressure for additional accommodation for the work amongst young people resulted in the decision by the members to celebrate the Centenary of the founding of the cause, by erecting a building on the remainder of the land at the rear of the premises of the church, to accommodate 300 people. The Foundation Stone of this new building (which is still preserved in the Joseph Richards Room at Meredith Road) was laid by Dr. John Clifford on 26th August



## WHITEFRIARS LANE CHAPEL 1825-1869

1922. The provision of this room greatly assisted the work done by the Rev. William Gayton during his ministry in the years 1922-26 when its membership was over 300, with more than 600 on the roll of the Sunday School and Bible Classes, while it was fully used for week night and social activities of the members of Guides, Scouts, Gymnasium and Football Clubs, etc., the work continuing under the ministries of the Rev. F.R. Conibear (1927-1932) and the Rev. William Reece (1932-1939)

There is not enough spare space in this short history to list the names of all the ministers who faithfully served Christ and Gosford Street in its 70 years life as an independent church, but their work has shown itself in numberless lives in the city and elsewhere as evidence of the continuing grace of God operating to witness in good deeds to His Glory.

## THE YEARS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

At the outbreak of the war in September 1939, the Church was without a minister, but with the help of supplies for Sunday Services, and the loyalty of officers and members it continued as a regular place of worship until the night of 19th/20th October 1940 when a bomb exploded at the base of a corner of the church building damaging the organ as well as rendering the premises unsafe to use. The Service planned for the morning of Sunday 20th October 1940 could not, therefore, be held, so the officers of the church present went immediately to approach those of St. Michael's Baptist Church, near the Cathedral, about a mile away from Gosford Street Church, and asked whether they and their congregation could worship with them pending the position becoming clearer.

They were cordially welcomed to do so by them and their Pastor, the Rev. Joseph Richards, and worshipped there for three Sundays, including a Joint Communion Service, when a greater blow fell on the joint congregation, as the Church in which they were worshipping, St. Michael's was completely destroyed by bombs and fire, on 14th November 1940. Faced with this tragedy, the Rev. J. Richards and his wife decided they would still stay and minister to the joint congregations.

He obtained the use of a room at Queen's Road Baptist Church by the kindness of the officers there, and accordingly advertised a meeting in the local paper to be held there on 24th November 1940.

In spite of the loss of some members killed in the air raid, others injured and evacuated owing to homes damaged, about 40 members of the two Churches gathered for worship and a meeting that followed, decided to recommend the members to accept the Rev. J. Richards as Pastor. This was done by postal ballot and as from 1st January 1941, he officially became Pastor of the Joint Churches, with all monies contributed going into a common Joint Churches Account and the officers of both Churches meeting as one body.



## GOSFORD STREET CHURCH 1869-1950

After strenuous efforts, one room at Gosford Street was made usable by the end of April 1941, services of worship were commenced, and gathering together made of those Sunday School scholars that had not been evacuated.

Notwithstanding general war conditions, air raids, etc., services were maintained, children taught, and the fellowship under God's blessing was so warm and real, that at a meeting in March 1945, before the end of the war, it was resolved by the members of the Joint Churches that a common Building Fund should be started in order to obtain two new sites in the city to replace those of the two old churches, which it was considered would not be allowed to be rebuilt, a step in faith which God rewarded, so that by May 1947 two new sites had been purchased with the help of the Baptist Union, in good residential districts, one at Quinton Park, Cheylesmore, on the S.W. side of the city where is now flourishing work and complete suite of buildings replacing St. Michael's Baptist Church, and one on the N.E. side of the city at Meredith Road, Wyken, replacing Gosford Street Baptist Church.

## THE POST WAR YEARS

Having secured two sites for the future work, the members then formally united under the title of Gosford Saint Michael's Baptist Church with a common membership roll, with the Rev. Joseph Richards as Pastor, who did his utmost to promote the continuity of the fellowship although the extension work, in addition to that in the room at Gosford Street had been started temporarily at Cheylesmore Community Centre, and at Ravensdale Road Council Day School, Wyken, respectively on Sunday only as a preliminary to erecting buildings on the sites acquired.

The Rev. J. Richards saw a Church Hall erected on each site before he passed to Higher Service on 17th February 1954, with these as a visible tribute to his work for Christ and the Church. Both sections at Meredith Road and Quinton Park each with a Church Hall on their respective new sites having become strong causes in their own localities, the members resolved to follow the original plan made in March 1945, and as from 30th September 1954 to become independent churches, with members agreeing to come on the roll of the Church nearest their homes, and to attend there irrespective of which Church they were originally members. This has proved a source of strength and blessing to each fellowship and the association has been maintained by an Annual Re-Union since the Gosford Street premises were finally closed for worship on 30th September 1951.

## THE WORK AT MEREDITH ROAD

The first building to be opened at Meredith Road was the Church Hall on 14th January 1950 by R. Wilson Black, Esq., J.P. to which was added the Garlick Room on 1st December 1956 (in memory of an old and faithful member of Gosford Street) to meet the increasing pressure of the work amongst young people under the first Minister of Meredith Road, the Rev. E. Bryn-Jones (1955-59) followed by the Rev. Richard J. Garrett, B.A. (1960-1966) during whose ministry the planning of the new Church building and Joseph Richards Room was begun. These were opened on 19th October 1968, free of debt, by Sir Cyril Black M.P. (son of the forementioned, R. Wilson Black, Esq., J.P.) enabling the Church to start Family Worship services under the Rev. David E. Beer, who concluded a five years Ministry of fruitful and developing work on 31st January 1972.

The starting of the services led to larger congregations and an increase in the numbers attending Junior Church, particularly in the 12-16 age group, so that a further building to accommodate these and the growing activities of the Church has now been given planning permission as at May 1972. It is estimated to cost £10,000, towards which the members have raised nearly £3,000. With a new estate of nearly 300 privately owned houses being erected only about a ten minutes walk from the church, it looks forward under God's blessing and the leadership of Mr. Maurice Markham of Spurgeon's College, (who is to be inducted as Pastor on 9th September 1972) to greater opportunities to witness and work for its Lord and Master Jesus Christ in an ever growing and wider field in this its 150th Anniversary year - to mark the pilgrimage of its members over the years in the various buildings they occupied to Meredith Road from that founded in a room in Bell Court, Much Park Street, Coventry, on 25th August 1822.