

The Dissenters of Sherfield, their Meeting Houses and how they changed the law of the land

Peter Lansley

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Introduction

This review started as an investigation of the origins and use of a Meeting House at Bowling's Farm, Sherfield on Loddon, in the nineteenth century: who owned it, who used it, what happened to it, and what then followed. Whilst initially this appeared to be a relatively simple quest, as each new fact emerged, so more questions were posed, and interesting answers identified.

In summary, at a time of upheaval and change in the way people chose to worship, if at all, this humble building made a significant contribution to the life of Sherfield. It was the first building in the village devoted to supporting Protestant dissenters: from 1807, as a Meeting House for Independents (Congregationalists); and, subsequently from 1842, as a Chapel for Primitive Methodists. Its role in the spiritual development of parishioners in the nineteenth century, a key ingredient in the history of the village, should be not underestimated or disregarded, nor should the contribution of the owners of Bowling's Farm in accommodating the building on their land.

¹ This is an evolving paper – which undoubtedly will change in both small and major detail, as more information becomes available! For more information, please contact peterlansley@managementreality.com

A Chapel or Meeting House

The 1841 Tithe Map and Tithe Awards for Sherfield-upon-Loddon², show three places of worship: St Leonards Parish Church (Plot 187); a House, Garden and Chapel in Breach Lane (Plot 112), owned by John Tubb (1775-1861) of Breach Farm, where the present Baptist Chapel stands; and a Chapel and Yard (Plot 73)ⁱ, opposite Rose Cottage on the Causeway or Cast Road (now Goddard's Lane). This was in a paddock in the northern corner of Bowling's Farm where 1 Orchard Lea is now situated. Although this chapel and its activities would have been independent of the farm, the land which it occupied was part of the farm. As it was a religious building, no tithes were levied.

Evidently the Chapel was a Meeting House for Protestant dissenters. This is confirmed by two documents. Firstly, the will of David Fenton, a prominent dissenter, dated 1831, the year in which he died, who owned the Farm from c1814³. Secondly, a Dissenters' Meeting House Certificate issued by the Diocese of Winchester, in July 1807, for a '*newly erected meeting house*' in Sherfield, naming its minister as Andrew Pinnell⁴.

There is no evidence of there being other dissenters' Meeting Houses in the village at that time. Although dissenters could meet in private homes, even they needed a licence in the form of a Certificate to do so. Only one Certificate was issued prior to that for the Meeting House at Bowling's Farm; in 1798, naming the home of Daniel David, evidently it was for Wesleyans.



Figure 1: Tithe Map 1841 and plot numbers: Chapel and Yard (73) and Bowling's Farm: house (75), farm buildings and nearby yards and paddles (72, 74, 76, 77, 78).

² *Sherfield on Loddon Tithe Map and Award*, Hampshire Record Office (CD). Tithe Map HRO, 21M65/F7/206/2; Tithe Award HRO, 21M65/F7/206/1

³ *David Fenton's Will*: Ancestry.com

⁴ *A Hampshire Miscellany III, Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates 1702-1844*, Arthur J Willis, 1965, page 133.

Further evidence of the Meeting House

Other evidence of the existence of the building is given by a partial plan of the village in the particulars for the auction of the estates of Bernard Brocas in 1826⁵.

Later, the OS 1873 map⁶ shows a building of about 33ft x 20ft (10m x 6m), larger than that on the Tithe Map, not shared with an adjoining farm building, and on a bigger plot. However, the building is not mentioned in auction particulars for the farm in either 1882⁷ or 1891⁸, and it does not appear on the OS 1896 map. So, the Meeting House 'disappeared' between 1871, when an OS survey was carried out, and 1882, probably in the mid-1870s. However, a Meeting Room is shown on OS 1896. Built for the "Brethren" in 1875, it was not a successor to the Meeting House. In modern times, c1987, the "Room", as it was called by villagers, was converted into a home, now called Goddard's Hall.



Figure 2: OS 1873 1:2500 (25" to 1 mile)



Figure 3: OS 1896 1:2500

No doubt, the Meeting House would have been dismantled quickly and the materials, including any rubble⁹, then used elsewhere on the farm, with the area it had occupied being incorporated into the adjoining paddock, named the Piddle by the Chapel.

⁵ Evidence of the existence of the Meeting House in 1826 is given in a partial plan of the village provided in the particulars for the auction of the estates of Bernard Brocas. This shows a building in the same position as the 'Chapel' shown on the subsequent 1841 Tithe Map. Since agricultural buildings not owned by Brocas are not shown, at the very least it can be assumed that this building had some public purpose. *Sherfield (-on-Loddon): sale particulars of 'Wheelers Court Farm', 127 acres, 'St. Thomas Well's Farm', 212 acres, 'Hill Farm', 83 acres, 'Benham's Farm', part of Wheelers Court, 40 acres, 'Bowbridge Farm', 41 acres, 'Breach', 47 acres, dwelling house, water corn mill, messuages and cottages, 1826, 10M57/SP615, Hampshire Archives*

⁶ OS 1873 and OS 1896 maps: <https://maps.nls.uk/os/25inch-england-and-wales/hampshire.html>

⁷ *Sherfield Green: sale particulars of 'Bowling's Farm', 1882, 10M57/SP619, Hampshire Archives*

⁸ *Sherfield-on-Loddon: sale particulars of 'Bowlings Farm', 1891, 10M57/SP628, Hampshire Archives*

⁹ At that time Portland cement mortar and concrete were not in general use. Walls built using lime mortar were easily broken up, leaving little residue.

Indeed, Donald Rickwood, who worked at Court Farm, which had incorporated Bowling's Farm in 1927, recalled that sometime in the 1950s he cleared the area where the Meeting House had stood, although at the time he did not know about the Meeting House. While *"the ground was sandier than the rest of the paddock and there were some pieces of broken tile, there was nothing to suggest that a building had stood there"*, thus reinforcing the notion that the Meeting House had been just a simple farm building which subsequently had been removed rather than left to disintegrate¹⁰.

Despite there being no remaining physical evidence of the Meeting House, in relatively recent times its past presence was well known. For example, one of the first owners of 1 Orchard Lea, recalled that in the 1990s both Percy Sims (1919-2011) and Bob Bulpitt (1916-2014) mentioned a chapel situated on the site of her house¹¹. These memories were either handed down from an earlier generation, or these two well-known guardians of village history may have seen the Tithe Map.

Who owned Bowling's Farm, the site of the Meeting House?

Nothing is known about Thomas Parker who owned Bowling's Farm at the time the Meeting House was constructed, except that he lived in Reading.

By 1814, the farm was owned by David Fenton (1750-1831), a retired Scottish Linen Factor of the City of London, then living in Reading. Whilst Land Tax Assessments show that Fenton did not pay Land Tax on Bowling's Farm until 1814, it is possible that he owned the farm earlier¹².

The farm would have been well located, a country residence within easy reach from his home in Reading, less than two hours carriage drive away¹³. As David Fenton was a committed and active Protestant dissenter, it is appealing to suggest that the Meeting House would have been one of the attractions for purchasing Bowling's Farm; but that is pure speculation. It's more probable that, as the owner of the farm, he would have been prudent not to be closely involved with its activities.

Later the farm would have been at a convenient location for David Fenton; near to Basingstoke where his daughter Janett (1792-1875) lived from 1823

¹⁰ *Personal Communication*, Donald Rickwood, 2021

¹¹ *Personal Communication*, Sheena Archer, 2000

¹² The proprietorship given in Land Tax Assessments changed to Fenton in 1814 but the property may have been purchased up to two or three years earlier. *Basingstoke Division land tax assessments, Sherfield-on-Lodden, 1800, 1803-1832, Q22/1/1/91*, Hampshire Archives.

¹³ David Fenton was very well-off, owning freehold properties in Reading, land in Berkshire and 388 acres of land in Warnborough, Wiltshire, as well as having many investments.

until c1846, with her husband, the Reverend James Wills (1784-1846), a minister at the London Street Independent (later Congregational) Church¹⁴, and their children.

James Wills was active in helping to establish dissenters' chapels in the area; for example, his signature appears on Certificates for Meeting Houses in Old Basing (1829), Worting Bottom (1833), and Overton (1836). Although there is no evidence, it is plausible that he would have preached at the Meeting House.



Figure 4 :
The Reverend James Wills

David Fenton died in 1831. The Farm, including the Meeting House, was bequeathed to his grandchildren Jane Forrest Winkworth (1812-1882) and Charlotte Ellen Winkworth (1814-1835), children of his daughter, Margaret Mary Fenton (1784-1816), and son-in-law, William Winkworth (1779-1857). William Winkworth then managed the affairs of the farm until his death in 1857. It is not known who handled these affairs subsequently, but they appear not to have been handled well. Jane Fenton died in 1882, her sister having predeceased her, and the farm including the house was sold. The particulars for the farm's auction in 1882 do not mention the Meeting House or the building which it had housed. By then it had disappeared.

Dissenters and the Law

By 1750, after the turmoil of the 16th century Reformation and the 17th century civil wars, Britain was the leading Protestant power in Europe. However, just as Protestants had challenged the Catholic Church so, from the mid-seventeenth century, the Established (Anglican) Church, was confronted by several forms of Protestant non-conformity: including Quakers, Presbyterians, Independents (Congregationalists), and Baptists.

Life was tough for those who dissented from the established church. At the beginning of the reign of Charles II in 1660, the victorious Royalists called for the exclusion of Roman Catholics, Nonconformists and non-Christians from

¹⁴ Reverend James Wills of the London Road Independent Church is mentioned in '*Liturgical and Congregational*': *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion Church in Basingstoke c1755 to c1969*. www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/explore/sites/explore/files/explore_assets/2018/06/09/countess_of_huntingdon_explore_asset.pdf. There is also a reference to the undated engraving shown in Figure 4, of Rev. J. Wills, active 1838-1845, Methodist Minister, Basingstoke, by James Cochrane at the Scottish Portrait Gallery www.nationalgalleries.org/es/art-and-artists/41501/rev-j-wills-active-1838-1845-methodist-minister-basingstoke?search=J.%20Cochrane. However, as he is not mentioned in commentaries about Wesleyans or Primitive Methodists in Basingstoke during his time in the town, the reference to him being a Methodist minister is incorrect.

holding official positions, leading to the Corporation Act (1661); and for the imposition of a uniform Anglican faith, resulting in the Act of Uniformity (1662), by which all Anglican clergy were forced to accept in full the Book of Common Prayer or be evicted from their 'livings'. Around 2,000 clergy refused to accept this condition. Legislation to prevent attendance at services conducted by those who called themselves dissenting ministers followed. The Conventicle Act (1664) imposed penalties for those who attended services not conducted according to the Book of Common Prayer. This made it unlawful for more than five people aged 16 and over, besides the household, to 'be present at any Assembly, Conventicle, or Meeting' for religious worship other than that of the Church of England. It was intended to prevent ejected ministers from gathering new congregations. The Five Mile Act (1665) prevented dissenting or nonconformist ministers from living in or visiting any place where they had previously served as ministers. Also, anyone who refused to conform was subject to Elizabethan-era recusancy laws (originally introduced against Roman Catholics) for not attending church on Sundays, or for failing to receive holy communion at least once a year.

However, as it was impossible to impose a uniform Anglican faith, in 1672 Charles II issued a *Declaration of Indulgence* which permitted the licencing of premises for dissenting services; but Test Acts (1673 & 1678) obliged anyone holding public office to take the sacraments in an Anglican Church. Like the earlier Corporation Act (1661), these were intended to stop dissenters from holding public offices. In 1688, when William and Mary, replaced Catholic James II, an Act of Toleration was passed allowing for the free worship of dissenters, although this did not include Roman Catholics or groups like Unitarians.

However, the Schism Act (1714), was designed to stamp out dissent by preventing nonconformists and Catholics educating their children in their own schools. Teachers had to apply for licences: granted only if they had taken the Anglican sacrament within the previous year. On the day the Act was due to take effect, Queen Anne died, and her successor, George I, took no steps to enforce it. It was repealed in 1719. The only other major gain made by dissenters in the eighteenth century was the Dissenters' Relief Act (1779), which freed ministers from the need to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England as required by the Toleration Act, and permitted tutors and schoolmasters to teach without needing to be licensed.

The Conventicle and Five Mile Acts were repealed in 1812. The Trinity Act (1813), gave Unitarians freedom of worship on the same terms as Trinitarians. Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts was finally achieved in 1828, though

most dissenters had to wait until the Municipal Reform Act (1835) to hold office. The Reform Act (1832) widened the right to vote in parliamentary elections to include representation from the major industrial towns, where dissent was particularly strong. As a result, dissent became a powerful force in parliament during the later nineteenth century.

Meeting House Certificates

While in the 1700s many major towns, such as Reading, were a cauldron of dissent, such advances were late in coming to Basingstoke, and even later to Sherfield.

An analysis of the nearly 1500 certificates issued by the Winchester Diocese for meeting houses in Hampshire, during four time periods, shows the large increase over time in the number of certificates issued, from an average between 2 and 3 a year in the early 1700s, to 29 a year by the mid-1800s (Table 1). Such a growth rate is hardly surprising. In the early 1700s there were severe restrictions on the activities of dissenters. Despite some reforms, they were still considerable in the late 1700s. By the first quarter of the 1800s the constraints had weakened, but whilst some constraints remained, by the second quarter there was much more freedom.

Whilst only 22% of the certificates provide sufficient information, the trends are clear, away from Quaker and Presbyterian towards Independent (Congregational) which was dominant, Baptists, and various forms of Methodist, with Primitive Methodist making its entrance in the final period.

Table 1: Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates: Winchester Diocese

Denomination	Quaker	Presbyterian	Baptist	Independent & Congregationalist	Methodist	Wesleyan & Wesleyan Methodist	Primitive Methodist	Other Denominations	Total identified Denominations	Not known	Total Certificates
1702-1750	3	12	12					3	30	82	112
1751-1800		4	31	36	12			2	85	174	259
1801-1822			9	53	36	4			102	361	463
1823-1844			29	42	6	16	15	5	113	551	664
<i>Total</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>131</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>330</i>	<i>1168</i>	<i>1498</i>
Other: Anabaptists 2; Seceders 1; Calvinistic Baptists 1; Calvinistic Dissenters 1; Countess Huntingdon's Connexion 2; Bible Christians 2; Armenian 1											

In the first period 1702-1750, just three certificates were issued for Meeting Houses in Basingstoke, all for Baptists and none in Sherfield and 'nearby villages' (Table 2). However, the accelerating rate at which certificates were issued is also clear. They were most frequently issued for Independents.

Certificates for Primitive Methodists, what was then a new denomination, first appear in the last period (1823-1844) in Sherfield and 'nearby villages' but not Basingstoke.

In most cases the Meeting Houses were ordinary homes, which provided the opportunity for new congregations to develop and, if successful and resources were available, for existing or new buildings to be used. As far as the records reveal, only 11 of the 59 certificates issued for the Basingstoke, Sherfield and villages near Sherfield, were for dedicated buildings. Some of which were purpose-built, others were, for example, farm buildings turned to a new use (Table 3).

Table 2: Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates: Basingstoke, Sherfield and Nearby Parishes

Period	Basingstoke			Nearby Villages		Sherfield				Denomination Not Known				
Denomination	Baptist	Independent	Lady Huntingdons Connexion	Independent	Primitive Methodist	Wesleyan	Independent	Primitive Methodist	Total Known	Ba-stoke	Nearby	Sherfield	Total Not Known	Grand Total
1702-1750	3								3	2			2	5
1751-1800	1	2		2		1			6	4	2		6	12
1801-1822		1					1		2		6		6	8
1823-1844		1	1	3	3	2		2	12	2	20		25	34
Total	4	4	1	5	3	3	1	2	23	8	28	0	39	59
<i>Nearby Villages: Old Basing, Bramley, Heckfield, Mattingley, Monk Sherborne, Mortimer West End, Newnham, Pamber, Rotherwick, Sherborne St John, Silchester, Stratfield Saye</i>														

Table 3: Type of Meeting House: Dedicated Building and Homes: Basingstoke, Sherfield and Nearby Parishes

	Certificates			Dedicated building			Home		
	Basing-stoke	Nearby Villages	Sher-field	Basing-stoke	Nearby Villages	Sher-field	Basing-stoke	Nearby Villages	Sher-field
1702-1750	5						3		
1751-1800	7	4	1	1	1		6	3	1
1801-1844	1	6	1	1	1	1	0	5	0
1823-1844	4	26	4	2	5	3	2	21	1
Total	17	36	6	4	7	3	13	29	2
<i>Nearby Villages: Old Basing, Bramley, Heckfield, Mattingley, Monk Sherborne, Mortimer West End, Newnham, Pamber, Rotherwick, Sherborne St John, Silchester, Stratfield Saye</i>									

A Spiritual Waste Land

Hampshire in the early 1800s, was almost wholly rural and agricultural, populated largely by agricultural labourers¹⁵. Life for them was the complete opposite of the polite, ordered and cultured world depicted by that famous daughter of Basingstoke, Jane Austen. Most were illiterate, living in pitiful conditions, often close to starvation, kept in their place by the gentry and in many cases by the parson, who in turn considered them too worldly to benefit from religion. So, they rarely went to church, feeling that they were not wanted there¹⁶.

It was into this desperate situation that a few villagers, inspired by their own beliefs, developments which they had heard about, and persuasive orators visiting Basingstoke, sought new opportunities for exercising and growing their beliefs, and influencing others, well away from the established church. Several of these pioneers were agricultural labourers!

At the time the Meeting House at Bowling's Farm was built, there is no evidence of any organised Protestant movements in Sherfield other than Wesleyans. Although they held meetings in Sherfield in the 1700s¹⁷, mostly if not wholly in the open, there is no evidence of a chapel or meeting house until 1798 - the home of Daniel David, and by the early 1800s, Wesleyans were in decline.

Those who identified as Protestant dissenters and wished to commune with others for spiritual guidance and sustenance would have had to find it outside the village, probably in Basingstoke, although even by then there was a long-established Baptist Chapel in Beech Hill. It is still functioning as such.

The Sherfield Certificates

By 1844, six certificates for Meeting Houses in Sherfield are known to have been issued. As well as purpose-built Meeting Houses and chapels, farm buildings and homes served such a purpose. However, as the Certificates are not at all precise, establishing where each was located and which religious denominations they supported, is not straightforward. Current research into the history of the Baptist movement in the village, especially in relation to the Baptist Chapel in Breach Lane, will provide welcome additional information.

¹⁵ *Rural Rides*, William Cobbett, 1830, Penguin, London

¹⁶ Abstract of article *Condition of the agricultural labourer*, Rev W Rowe, *Aldersgate Magazine*, 1900, cited in *The Great River*, David M Young, Tentmaker Publications, 2016

¹⁷ Evidence of meetings of Wesleyans in Sherfield is given in *Basingstoke: Church Street Methodist Circuit from John Wesley's visits till its formation in 1872 and first purpose-built chapel in 1875*, David M. Young, Chester University, 2016

Table 4: Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates issued for Sherfield on Loddon: 1702-1844¹⁸

	<i>Date</i>	<i>Remarks on Certificate</i>	<i>Probable location and following</i>	<i>Hampshire Archives Finding Number</i>
1	February 1798	Premises of Daniel David, protestant dissenters	Private Home Wesleyan ^{19 20}	21/M65/F2/3/134
2	July 1807	Newly erected Meeting House, protestant dissenters	Bowling's Farm Independent	21/M65/F2/3/216
3	March 1828	Premises of William Taphouse, poulterer, protestants	Private Home Wesleyan	21/M65/F2/4/322
4	May 1831	The building at Sherfield Green, protestants	Breach Lane Chapel Wesleyan	21/M65/F2/5/23
5	January 1835	Premises of William Taphouse, protestants	Private Home Primitive Methodist	21/M65/F2/5/154
6	May 1842	A chapel now in the occupation of Primitive Methodists, protestants	Bowling's Farm Primitive Methodist	21/M65/F2/7/2
Note: Th first two certificates refer to dissenters but the later certificates do not				

The First Certificate: Home of Daniel David

The first certificate, issued in 1798, was for the home of Daniel David, evidently for Wesleyans. The certificate takes the form of a petition to the Bishop of Winchester, which has been endorsed on his authority. This document contains eight signatures, five of which are also on the next certificate to be issued, and some are to be found on subsequent certificates. A transcript²¹ is given in Figure 5. The suggestion is that these were prime movers in supporting and encouraging Protestant dissenters in Sherfield.

¹⁸The available records for the Winchester diocese, cover 1706 to 1844. After 1852 meeting houses could be registered with the Registrar of Birth, Marriages and Deaths rather than with the Diocese. But the records of the Registrar have not been located, and may no longer exist. *A Hampshire Miscellany III, Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates 1702-1844*, Arthur J Willis, 1965

¹⁹ "About four miles from Basingstoke is the village of Sherfield on Loddon. Here, in February 1798, the dwelling house of Daniel David was licensed for religious worship, the certificate being signed among others by Sam Toomer and William Taphouse. Samuel Toomer signed elsewhere also for Wesleyan certification, and William Taphouse was a Wesleyan before his transference to the Primitive Methodists in the 1830s." *Basingstoke: Church Street Methodist Circuit from John Wesley's Visits till its formation in 1872 and its first purpose-built chapel in 1875*, David M Young, 2016. Note that William Taphouse did not become a Wesleyan until later.

²⁰ Two of the signatories also signed certificates for other Wesleyan meeting houses, Sam Toomer (Monk Sherborne, Sherborne St. John) and Joseph Jefferson (Monk Sherborne). A few years later Joseph Jefferson was the Minister and London Street, Independent Chapel, Basingstoke.

²¹ Copyright regulations prevent the reproduction of the original certificates.

Although Protestants, Wesleyans were not dissenters²². However, despite Wesley wishing to avoid a split with the Church of England, in 1787, following legal advice, he decided to license his chapels and preachers under the Toleration Act; not as dissenters but simply as 'preachers of the gospel'²³. This may explain the absence of certificates for Wesleyan Meeting Houses before 1800. However, the certificate for the home of Daniel David, for Wesleyans, does not have the suggested wording but simply mentions "protestant dissenters".

February 1st 1798

This is to certify that the Dwelling-House and Premises of Daniel David in the Parish of Sherfield-upon-Loddon in the Diocese of Winchester and County of Southampton, are intended to be set apart for the Worship of Almighty God by a Congregation of Protestant dissenters - that the same may be duly registered in the Bishop's Court, as the Law according to the Toleration Act, requires in such Cases -

Signed by Michael Cane
Joseph Jefferson
Micl Cane
Sam Toomer
John James Cane
Daniel Forrester?
Wm Taphouse
William Baker
John Sewry

February 7:1798
Made out licence according to the Requisition of the subporitue ?
C Ridding ?

**Figure 5: Transcript of the First Certificate, 1798
Home of Daniel David**

One name which appears as a signature on two certificates, and later as the occupant of private homes for which two further certificates were sought, is William Taphouse²⁴.

The Great River, a history of Primitive Methodism in Northern Hampshire has some valuable information about William. "One William Taphouse was born 22nd July 1783 at Sherfield Green. His first religious convictions came under the preaching of an Independent minister in Basingstoke, but these were "checked by uninformed advisors", and he lived in fear of an awful end to his life." "Later, when he was still young, he went with a friend to hear the Wesleyans, after which he soon came to faith, opened his house for preaching, and himself became both a class leader and a local preacher." "In December 1833 the Shefford Primitive Methodist Circuit opened a mission in and around Sherfield Green. William joined them, and opened his house for their preaching, but for this he was evicted from his home²⁵. Nonetheless he continued to help

²² "Protestants of the Church of England were not Dissenters: they were Wesleyans". Basingstoke: Church Street Methodist Circuit from John Wesley's visits till its formation in 1872 and its first purpose-built chapel in 1875, David M. Young, Chester University, 2016
www.primitivemethodism.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/wesleyans-1738-1875.pdf

²³ *The Toleration Act 1689. A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland.*

²⁴ However, as the William Taphouse b1783, who played a major role in establishing meeting houses in Sherfield, even when very young, would have been just fifteen at the time of the first certificate and his signature on the next certificate differs somewhat, it is possible that his father, also named William Taphouse, born 1750, signed the first certificate, and William Taphouse, born 1783, signed the second.

²⁵ On Greenway, facing Sherfield Green, possibly owned by Francis Conant Pigott Esquire.

their work.” “He himself preached his last sermon at the camp meeting held at Sherfield Green in August 1835, and he died on 3rd February 1836.”²⁶

The second certificate (1807) on which he is named, was in support of Independents, the third for Wesleyans (1828), and the fifth (1835) for Primitive Methodists, each of which are consistent with William’s journey through faith²⁷. The date when William became a Wesleyan may be indicated by where his children were baptised. Those born before 1807 and after 1818 were baptised in Sherfield Parish Church, but between times in chapels which were strongly evangelical - Lady Huntingdon’s Connexion and Independent. This sequence would be consistent with William being an Independent between 1807 and 1818, but a Wesleyan from then until the early 1830s when he became a Primitive Methodist. Since the Wesleyan movement never formally dissented from the established church, presumably there was no conflict arising from their children being baptised in the Parish Church during the period when he was a Wesleyan. William’s last child was baptised in Sherfield in 1827, before he became a Primitive Methodist.

The Second Certificate: Meeting House at Bowling’s Farm

The second certificate was issued in 1807, for the Meeting House at Bowling’s Farm.

The first signatory, the Reverend Andrew Pinnell (1775-1858)²⁸ was based at Mortimer Independent Chapel. That chapel had been built in 1798, not long before Pinnell arrived in Mortimer c1803. It was there, aged 28, that he started his ministry²⁹ and from where he pursued it for the rest of his life, locally and across North Hampshire, living in Chapel House,

To the Right Revd Father in God, Brownlow, by divine permission Lord Bishop of Winchester or to his Vicar General and official principal.

These are to certify that a newly erected Meeting House, situate in the Parish of Sherfield, in the County of Hampshire, and in the Diocese of Winchester, is set apart and appropriated for Religious worship, for the use of his Majesties protestant Subjects, dissenting from the Church of England, according to an Act of Parliament made in the first year of the Reign of our late Sovereigns King William and Queen Mary intituled an Act for exempting their Majesties protestant Subjects dissenting from the Church of England, from the penalties of certain laws; as witness our hands this 4th day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seven.

<i>Certificate</i>	<i>Andrew Pinnell, Minister</i>
<i>granted</i>	<i>Michl Cane</i>
<i>July 16. 1807</i>	<i>John Cane</i>
<i>I. R. DReg</i>	<i>William Taphouse</i>
	<i>John Sewry</i>
	<i>John Gosling</i>
	<i>James Gosling</i>
	<i>Daniel David</i>

Figure 6: Transcript of the Second Certificate, 1807 Meeting House at Bowling’s Farm

²⁶ *The Great River*, David M Young, Tentmaker Publications, 2016

²⁷ William and Ann Taphouse had many children. Those born before 1807 and after 1818 were christened in Sherfield Parish Church, but baptism records for: John b1807, Mary b1809, Ann b1811, Charles 1815 (Lady Huntingdon’s Connexion, Oat Street, Basingstoke), and George William b1813 (London Street Independent, Basingstoke), show that at those dates they lived in Old Basing. By the time of the birth of Thomas b1818 (Lady Huntingdon’s Connexion) shows that by they had returned to Sherfield. One record says that they lived in Cuffold (Cuffauld) in the Parish of Basing. Sherfield would have been within easy reach from there.

²⁸ The Reverend Andrew Pinnell hailed from Great Bedminster, Gloucestershire.

²⁹ *Welcome to Mortimer West End Chapel: Our Story*. www.thechapel.org.uk/our-story

or quite simply Mortimer Chapel, with his wife and children.

The other signatories were all local people: Daniel David, b1748, Sherfield; John Sewry, b1756, Hartley Wespall; William Taphouse, b1767, Sherfield; John Cane, b1777, Stratfield Turgis; Michael Cane, b1779, Stratfield Turgis; John Gosling, b1782, Bramley; and James Gosling, b1784, Bramley. The owner of Bowling's Farm (either Thomas Parker or David Fenton) was not a signatory.

The petition, to the Lord Bishop of Winchester, Brownlow North, was accepted, *Certificate duly endorsed, July 16, 1807*, with an undecipherable signature, presumably that of the bishop, or on his authority, with the petition thus becoming the certificate.

When the Meeting House was established, there were friendly relationships between Independents (Congregationalists), Baptists, Wesleyans and other Methodists, in the area. Some ministers often provided support to those who wanted to establish Meeting Houses for other followings, and individuals would provide similar encouragement. So, because the Meeting House had support from Wesleyans such as Daniel David does not imply that there was an expectation that the Meeting House would be for Wesleyans. Rather, these strong supporters of Protestant dissenters were giving their backing to the first dissenters' chapel in Sherfield – a major step forward for the village.

The signatures on the first two certificates illustrate the degree of mutual support in establishing Meeting Houses. Joseph Jefferson, an Independent minister who signed the certificate for Daniel David's home, is also named as minister for meeting houses in Monk Sherborne, 1794 and Basingstoke, 1801. Andrew Pinnell the minister named for the Meeting House at Bowling's Farm is also named as minister for meeting houses in East Oakley, 1814 and Sherborne St John, 1827. Certificates for the homes of some of the signatories were also issued. As well as Daniel David, Sherfield 1798; Michael Cane, Hartley Wespall, 1797; John Gosling, Bramley, 1818; James Gosling, Monk Sherborne, 1804 & Bramley 1832.

Independents

Andrew Pinnell, the founding minister, was an Independent minister and almost certainly the congregation of the Meeting House was Independent, not affiliated with any other particular religious following. They were Congregationalists. That is, they organised themselves, appointed their own minister, and in short, '*did their own thing*'.

How strongly the activities of the Meeting House developed as an Independent Congregational community is not known. At the time, when new perspectives and interpretations of religion, the gospel, belief and devotion, were emerging, it was not uncommon for communities to divide. This could have been the case with the Meeting House, when in 1820 William Taphouse who presumably had supported it whilst he was an Independent, became a Wesleyan. Given that it was not until 1828 when he opened his home as a Meeting House (the third Certificate), possibly his Wesleyan beliefs could be accommodated, at least initially. Also, he could have opened his home as a Meeting House not because of some split but simply because the Meeting House at Bowling's Farm was falling down, if the account by Kate Jackson³⁰ is correct and properly understood!

Within a few years William became a Primitive Methodist. The fifth certificate was issued in 1835, for the use of his home as meeting house issued, an initial step in establishing Primitive Methodists in Sherfield^{31 32}.

Transcripts of the two certificates for the use of the home of William Taphouse, in 1828 and 1835 respectively, are given below

To the Lord Bishop of Winchester

I Edward Venthiam Umbrella Maker High Street Winchester Do certify the House of William Taphouse - Poulterer in the Parish of Sherfield, County of Southampton is intended forthwith to be used as a place of religious worship by an Assembly or Congregation of Protestants and I do require you to register the same agreeable to Act of Parliament and hereby require a Certificate of thereof

Witness my hand this the Twenty Ninth Day of March 1828

Edwd Venthiam

Figure 7: Transcript of the Third Certificate, 1828 Home of William Taphouse

To the Right Noble the Bishop of Winchester and to his Registrar

We whose surnames are subscribed do certify that the house and Premises in the Occupation of William Taphouse of Sherfield Green in the Parish of Sherfield in the County of Southampton are intended to be used as and as a place of Religious Worship by an assembly of His Majesty's Protestant Subjects and do hereby request you to register the same this the Twentythird day of January in the year of our Lord One Thousand and Eighthundred and Thirty five

John Coxhead
Charles Green

Certified on Date
CW

Figure 8: Transcript of the Third Certificate, 1835 Home of William Taphouse

³⁰ *Sherfield on Loddon: The Founding of a Country Business*, (Margaret) Kate Jackson, unpublished manuscript c1948.

³¹ *The Great River*, David M Young, Tentmaker Publications, 2016

³² "There was a Wesleyan family in Sherfield through which the Primitive Methodist mission found its root in that village", David Martin Young, Personal Communication between David Young and Jan Holden, subsequently communicated to members of the Sherfield History Group (23.ix.2020).

The Fourth Certificate: Breach Lane Chapel

in 1831 a Certificate was issued for a new chapel built by John Tubb in Breach Lane, licensed for use by protestants.

Although there is a counter claim by Kate Jackson, discussed later, that the Chapel was not used by Wesleyans, other accounts state that initially the Chapel was used by Wesleyans³³. It is also known that by 1837 the chapel was not being used.

To the Lord Bishop of Winchester

I Edwd Venthiam Of High Street Winchester do certify that the Building at Sherfield Green in the Parish of Sherfield in the County of Southampton forthwith to be used as a place of Religious Worship by an Assemble or Congregation of protestants and I do require you to Register the same according to an act of parliament do require a Certificate of the same *Witness my hand this the Eighth Day of May One Thousand Eight Hundred & thirty one*

Witness

E Venthiam

*Certified 14 May 1831
CW*

Figure 9: Transcript of the Fourth Certificate, 1831 Breach Lane Chapel

However, at some time later it was used by Independents and by 1851 it had a very strong congregation, as discussed in a later section on the 1851 Religious Census. As the 1830s onwards was a period of rapid increases in congregations across most protestant denominations, there may have been little difficulty in building a viable congregation at Breach Lane Chapel. Also, it is entirely possible that in the c1840, some of the congregation of the Meeting House at Bowling's Farm migrated to Breach Lane Chapel, either because of some division within the congregation or because they were attracted by more comfortable premises. Perhaps some of that congregation had become Wesleyans and had already moved to the home of William Taphouse for their services, although by 1835 William Taphouse had become a Primitive Methodist.

The Sixth Certificate: The Chapel at Bowling's Farm

Whether or not the Meeting House at Bowling's Farm had fallen into disrepair, and the congregation dispersed, in 1842 a certificate was secured for the use of the Meeting House by Primitive Methodists. This new lease of life for the Meeting House lasted for over 20 years, until a purpose-built chapel for Primitives was constructed on the Village Green. The foundation stone was laid in 1866.

As a result, the congregation at Bowling's Farm Chapel would have moved to this purpose-built chapel. Shortly afterwards, in 1875, a Meeting Room for the

³³ J. A. Manser and Son Ltd., *Builders: A history of J. A. Manser and Son Ltd., and the village of its origin.*, c1987 (full reference needed)

Brethren was built across the road from the Chapel at Bowling's Farm, a third purpose-built 'chapel' in Sherfield for Protestant dissenters.

So, by c1871, the building at Bowling's Farm, more like a farm building, no longer had a purpose. However, for over 60 years, it had supported the needs of dissenters in Sherfield: initially, the establishment of the first congregation of Independents in the Village; and, subsequently the first congregation of Primitive Methodists. Both movements each spent 20 to 25 years there before moving to modern purpose-built premises. The contribution of this humble building in the life and development of the Sherfield on Loddon should not be underestimated.

To the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of Winchester and to his Registrar

I George Wallis of north waltham in the parish of north waltham in the County of Southampton do hereby certify that A Chapel and premises situate at Sherfield Green in the parish of Sherfield upon Loden in the County of Southampton and now in the holding and occupation of the primitive Methodist are intended to be used as A place of Religious worship by an assembly or congregation of protestants and I hereby request you to register and record the same according to the provisions of the Act passed in the 52nd year of the Reign of his Majesty King George the third entitled an Act to repeal certain Acts and amend other Acts relating to religious worship and assemblies and persons teaching and preaching therein and I hereby request A certificate thereof for with shall be taken no more than two shillings and sixpence witness my hand the twenty first day of may in the year of our Lord 1842

George Wallis

Note: George Wallis was a significant figure in establishing Primitive Methodism in the Basingstoke between 1831, when he entered the ministry and his death in 1894

Figure 10: Transcript of the Sixth Certificate, 1842 Chapel at Bowling's Farm

The Religious Census of Hampshire, 1851³⁴

Confirmation that the building at Bowling's Farm was being used as a Primitive Methodist chapel and that Breach Lane Chapel as a chapel for Independents in the 1850s is given by the Religious Census of 1851. This gives three places of Worship in Sherfield: St. Leonard's Parish Church, Primitive Methodist, and Sherfield Independent.

The last of these is Breach Lane Chapel, the date of erection of this 'place of worship' is given in the Census as 1831, the year that Breach Lane Chapel was built. At the time of the Census, it was used by Independents. Later documents, dated 1870, describe the Chapel or Meeting House as being used by Independents and Baptists. The 1851 Religious Census indicates that it had a minister – "*William Bromley, Minister, from Shinfield, Reading*", a baker and grocer living at Lambwood Hill, Three Mile Cross.

The information given for the 'Sherfield-upon-Loddon Primitive Methodist' is consistent with it being located in the former Meeting House at Bowling's

³⁴ *The Religious Census for Hampshire 1851*, John A Vickers (Ed), Hampshire County Council, 1993

Farm, in so far as it gives the date of erection of the chapel as 1810 - sufficiently close to the actual date of 1807, as not to be confused with any other building used for religious purposes. The minister is given as “*George Brown, Minister, Sherfield, near Basingstoke*”. In the 1851 Census, George Brown is described as an Agricultural Labourer, but in the next two censuses his occupation is Shopkeeper. He does not appear to be related to the family with the same surname which was involved with the Meeting Room for the Brethren erected some twenty-five years later.

Some statistics

The 1851 Religious Census of Hampshire lists just one Brethren Chapel in Hampshire, in Portsea, although it does identify 389 Church of England, 187 Methodist, 116 Independent churches, and 69 Baptist churches. There were only thirteen Roman Catholic Churches in the whole of Hampshire, and none in the Basingstoke area or near it. Catholics in Basingstoke travelled to Woolhampton for Mass³⁵.

The Census provides information about the accommodation available for congregations, and the size of congregations on 1st March 1851³⁶. It was claimed that St Leonard’s could accommodate just over 200 people³⁷, and had congregations across two Sunday services; for the Methodist Chapel the equivalent figures are accommodation of 210 and two congregations; and, for the Independents, there was accommodation for 140, and two congregations. Clearly, the Independents and Methodists were significant movements in Sherfield.

Despite the profusion of Protestant dissenters’ Meeting Houses and chapels, the Church of England was supported by the majority of those who attended services on the day of the census, Sunday 30th March 1851. In Hampshire, attendances at all services were 480,410; in the Basingstoke area, including outlying villages, 11,178; and, in Sherfield, 350 – see Table 5. The Church of England was strongly supported in Hampshire as a whole, and even more so in the Basingstoke area, but not in Sherfield, although the Sherfield Parish Church return may have been incorrect.

Despite some ambiguities with the attendance figures, such that they are not a simple count of people who attended a place of worship on the day of the

³⁵ *Holy Ghost Parish, Basingstoke – A history Part 1*, www.vinntec.co.uk/hg/XArchive/hghistext1.htm (accessed 13/2/2025)

³⁶ Many of the census returns completed by the rector or minister of each place are ambiguous, not least that for St Leonard’s.

³⁷ The Census return was very confused, possibly 100 people and a combined congregation of 45.

Census, a comparison of attendances with the population of the area covered shows: for the County as a whole, attendances per 100 members of the population was 68; for the Basingstoke area, 64; and, for Sherfield, 57. These differences may be more indicative of the opportunity to attend services and distances from homes to churches and chapels rather than the degree of commitment. This is a useful index of the vitality of the dissenters' chapels. For example, of the twelve parishes in the Basingstoke area which had dissenters' chapels, in Sherfield there were 42 attendances for every 100 members of the population; Silchester 74 (pm); Wootton St Lawrence 48 (ind, pm); Basingstoke town 47 (ind, pm, lhc, friendsmh); North Waltham 37 (pm); Others – 34, 17, 6, 4 (ind); 29, 24 (pm); 19 (bap). Perhaps interestingly, of the villages with Independent chapels, only Sherfield and Wootton St Lawrence also had Primitive Methodist chapels.

Compared with Hampshire, both Basingstoke and Sherfield show a much stronger presence of Primitive Methodists, which at the time was a relatively new denomination and still making significant progress in attracting members.

Table 5: Hampshire Religious Census 1851: Places of Worship and Attendances by Denomination

Place <i>Population 1851</i>	Hampshire <i>405,370</i>		Basingstoke Area <i>17,466</i>		Sherfield <i>615</i>	
Places of Worship	818		56		3	
Attendances		274,192		11,178		350
Church of England	389	59.8%	37	70.6%	1	25.7%
Dissenting Protestants	405	38.5%	19	29.4%	2	74.3%
<i>Independent</i>	116	15.4%	8	12.5%	1	43.4%
<i>Baptist</i>	69	6.9%	1	1.0%		
<i>Primitive Methodist</i>	58	3.6%	8	10.8%	1	30.9%
<i>Original Connexion (Methodist)</i>	80	7.6%				
<i>Bible Christians (Methodist)</i>	40	2.8%				
<i>Other Methodist</i>	9	0.5%				
<i>Lady Huntingdon's Connexion (Calvanistic Methodist)</i>	3	0.3%	1	4.5%		
<i>Other Dissenting Protestants</i>	30	1.4%	1	0.5%		
Roman Catholic	13	1.5%				
Other	11	0.3%				
Other Methodist: Wesleyan Methodist Association 8, Independent Methodists 1.						
Other Dissenting Protestants: Society of Friends 6, Unitarian 6, New Church 1, Brethren 1, Isolated Congregations 15, French Protestants 1.						
Other: Catholic and Apostolic Church 2, Latter Day Saints 7, Jews 2						
<i>Note: i) Attendances comprise 'scholars' as well as adults and include Sunday schools. ii) The return for St Leonards, Church of England, Sherfield was not properly completed, and may be incorrect.</i>						

Other surveys

Only one Religious Census was ever carried out, but gazetteers and directories are a useful source of information about the location of places of worship in the years which followed³⁸.

For Sherfield, both the *Post Office Directory for Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorsetshire, 1855* and *Harrod's Directory of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, 1865* mention that “*The Independents and Primitive Methodists have each a chapel here.*” John Marius Wilson’s *Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales, 1870-72* mentions chapels in the village, “*for Independents and Primitive Methodists*”. *Kelly's Directory, 1875* notes that “*there are chapels for Independents and Primitive Methodists*”. *Kelly's Directory, 1885* says “*Here are Congregational and Primitive Methodist chapels*”, Congregational being a synonym for Independents. *Kelly's Directory, 1889* records “*chapels for Baptists, Primitive Methodists and Plymouth Brethren*”, as does *Kelly's Directory, 1911*.

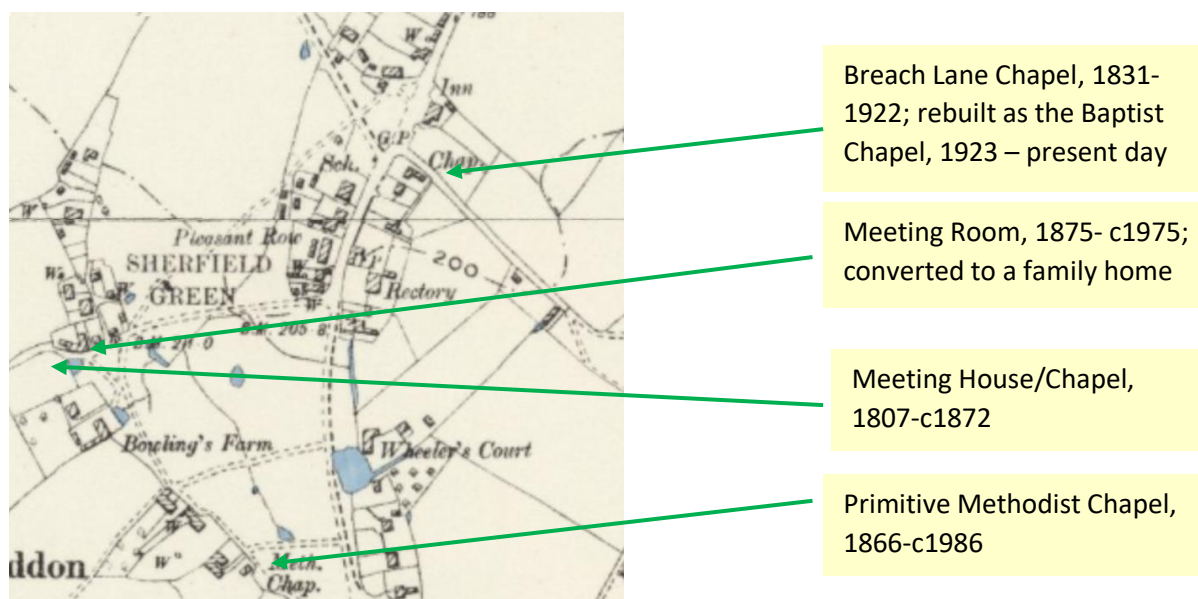


Figure 11: Chapels and Meeting Room, Sherfield Green, OS 1897 6" to the mile.

The references to Independents in the earlier directories through to 1875 refer to Breach Lane Chapel, as does the reference to a Congregational Chapel in the 1885 directory. It is known that at this time Breach Lane Chapel had become or was on a path to becoming a Baptist Chapel. The 1889 directory refers to Baptists, presumably at Breach Lane Chapel, and Plymouth Brethren,

³⁸ *Directories and Gazetteers: Ancestry.com*

presumably at the Meeting Room in what is now Goddard's Lane. Although the latter was built in 1875, it may have taken a few years for this to have registered with Kelly's.

The Other Chapels

This section provides further information about Breach Lane Chapel built in 1831, The Primitive Methodist Chapel built in 1866, and the Brethrens' Meeting Room built in 1875.

Breach Lane Chapel

In October 1825 Bernard Brocas sold the property where Breach Lane Chapel now stands to John Tubb, Yeoman, and Joseph Charles Shebbeare³⁹, Gentleman. Breach Lane Chapel was built by John Tubb a few years later, in 1831⁴⁰.



Figure 12: Tithe Map 1841: Cottage and Garden, Chapel (112), owned by John Tubb, occupied by Samuel Miles. Breach Farm House and Premises (140), owned and occupied by John Tubb.

The Chapel received a Dissenters' Meeting House Certificate dated 14th May 1831, "*for the Assembly and Congregation of Protestants*". It was described as "*The building at Sherfield Green*"⁴¹ by Edward Ventham, of the High Street, Winchester, a Wesleyan⁴², who had certified the meeting house to the Lord Bishop of Winchester on 8th May 1831 (Figure 9). Unlike the certificate for the Meeting House at Bowling's Farm, the certificate does not give any information

³⁹ An Attorney at Law, b1789, Farnham, living in Church Street Basingstoke (Censuses for 1841, 1851 and 1861).

⁴⁰ Date confirmed by plaque preserved in the existing chapel.

⁴¹ *Meeting House Certificate and A Hampshire Miscellany III, Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates 1702-1844*, Arthur J Willis, 1965, page 163.

⁴² *Baptism Record of Edward Ventham, England & Wales Non-conformist and Non-parochial Registers, 1567-1936*, Piece 1394, Winchester (Wesleyan), 1799-1836

about the minister or supporters of the chapel. Also, while it mentions Protestants it doesn't refer to dissenters.

On 17th May 1854 John Tubb *released his possession* of the Chapel to Ann Lunn⁴³, spinster, niece of Elizabeth Tubb, John Tubb's wife. The implication is that John Tubb had obtained Joseph Shebbeare's share sometime between 1825 and 1854. Having no offspring and in his mid-70s, probably John Tubb wanted the Chapel to be in the hands of the next generation, and so passed it to a beloved niece. No doubt he would have wanted to do this before her marriage later in 1854, when she became Mrs Ann Keep⁴⁴. As Joseph Shebbeare was in his 60s, he too may have felt the need to find a suitable recipient of his share of the property.

On 20th April 1870, Mr and Mrs John Keep Conveyed "*a Chapel or Meeting house at Sherfield on Loddon*" to a Trust comprising Trustees: George Thackham of Sherfield upon Loddon, Henry Jackson of Sherfield upon Loddon (Baker and Grocer), Phillip Davies of Reading (Baker, Grocer and Tallow Chandler), George Sale of Wokingham (Upholsterer), David Brown of Sherfield upon Loddon (Blacksmith), and Thomas Thorp of Reading (Bookseller)⁴⁵. The conveyance is very clear about the use of the Chapel then being currently used as a non-conformist chapel and that it should be used as such for many years hence. To quote one passage "*Upon Trust to permit the same at all times for now hereafter to be used as a Chapel or Meeting House for the public worship of God according to the Doctrines taught and usages of Evangelical non-conformists called Independents & Baptists*"

The Chapel when built and when used

Current research on the history of Breach Lane Chapel may be able to shed more light on which religious movements used it initially and changes of its users. In her memoir of village life in the early 1900s⁴⁶, Kate Jackson noted: "*The Chapel had been built for the Wesleyans⁴⁷, but before it was completed Mr Tubb had fallen out with them, so he presented it to the Baptists, who were*

⁴³ Ann Lunn was recorded on the 1851 Census return for John and Elizabeth Tubb, as a niece, aged 40, born in Pamber, c1811. Ann Lunn was daughter of Henry Lunn and Sarah Rowland who married in Basingstoke, 1808. There are many individuals with the surname Lunn in both Pamber and Crondall, the latter where Elizabeth was born. Births in Crondall show an Elizabeth b1779, and a Henry b1782 children of Daniel and Ruth Lunn.

⁴⁴ Ann Lunn married John Keep, butcher and farmer of Stratfield Turgis (b1806) in Abingdon, 1854. Ann died in May 1872. In December 1872, John Keep married Harriett Cane in Stratfield Turgis.

⁴⁵ *Conveyance of a Chapel or Meeting house at Sherfield on Loddon Hants and declaration of Trust*, Chandler and Son, Basingstoke, 20th April 1870.

⁴⁶ *Sherfield on Loddon: The Founding of a Country Business*, (Margaret) Kate Jackson, unpublished manuscript c1948.

⁴⁷ "Originally there was a Wesleyan chapel on this site ". *J. A. Manser and Son Ltd., Builders: A history of J. A. Manser and Son Ltd., and the village of its origin.* pg 27, c1987 (full reference needed)

in great need of a new Chapel as their old one was falling down." However, Baptist Chapel archives confirm, that by 1837 Breach Lane Chapel, which had been used by Wesleyan Methodists, was redundant⁴⁸. Although these two accounts conflict with respect to Wesleyans, they suggest that Baptists were using the chapel before the death of John Tubb in 1861.

However, since historical records also suggest that the Baptist congregation was not formed until the mid-1870s, Kate Jackson may have been referring to the existence of an earlier form of congregational community, which is known to have used the chapel. Certainly, there was a time when it was not in use as a chapel as although it is identified on the 1841 Tithe Map as a chapel, the way it is presented in the Tithe Award could indicate that it was not in use as a chapel at that time. However, according to the Religious Census of 1851, by then it was a thriving place for Independents.



Figure 13: The Baptist Chapel in Breach Lane, Sheffield on Loddon, 2022.

The present Baptist Chapel, paid for by the Jackson family, was built in 1923⁴⁹.

Primitive Methodists

Primitive Methodism did not spread quickly from its 1807 Staffordshire origins, and not to North Hampshire until the 1830s. However, it is thought that by c1835, although possibly later, there were two Methodist congregations in the village, one having broken away from the Primitive Methodists. It is not known where they met. One possibility is that the initial Methodist congregation changed from Wesleyan to Primitive Methodist c1830, as was the case of William Taphouse, and in due course part of its congregation then broke away to pursue a different form of Methodism. The new congregation may have been United Methodists, which were similar to Wesleyans.

According to the return made to the 1851 Religious Census, the Primitive Methodist congregation in the Parish used a chapel which was built in 1810⁵⁰. This date is close enough to 1807, when the Meeting House at Bowling's Farm was built for Independents, which the Primitives followed as its occupants in 1842, when a Certificate was issued. It may be fortunate that by then, the Meeting House having served its purpose for Independents, was free for others to use.

⁴⁸ G Belsham, 2022, Personal Communication

⁴⁹ Breach Lane Baptist Chapel <https://c20society.org.uk/c20-churches/breach-lane-baptist-chapel>.

⁵⁰ *The Religious Census for Hampshire 1851*, John A Vickers (Ed), Hampshire County Council, 1993

Directories and gazetteers available from 1855 (the earliest accessed) do not mention any Methodist congregation other than Primitive Methodist, (and although these mention a chapel, do not give its location). Probably, the break-away congregation was quite small and did not exist for long.

The foundation stone for Sherfield Green Primitive Methodist Chapel was laid on Monday July 2nd 1866⁵¹. It is not known when the chapel was completed. It is shown on the OS 1873 map on the south-west edge of Sherfield Green. In 1986 it was sold for conversion to a house⁵².

The history of the Baptist and Methodist congregations in the village is fascinating and complicated. More research is required! However, it would appear that there was close and sympathetic cooperation between these congregations and with Independents, especially since none was inclined to induce people to leave each other's congregations⁵³.

Independents and the Brethren

Whilst Independents were welcomed at Breach Lane Chapel, by 1870 the governance of the Chapel changed when its ownership passed to a board of trustees, and it was moving towards becoming a Baptist Chapel.

At the same time, some Independents in Sherfield chose to follow the strictures of the Christian Brethren (or Plymouth Brethren)⁵⁴ and, because of the changing orientation of the congregation of Breach Lane Chapel, they chose to meet elsewhere.

Information about their meeting place, is provided by correspondence in 1987 between Gladys Brown and Brian Pyle, and between her son, Rowland Brown, and Brian Pyle⁵⁵. This correspondence is particularly concerned with the activities of Sir Gillery Pigott, Baron of the Exchequer, who lived in Sherfield Hill

⁵¹ *Sherfield Green Primitive Methodist chapel*, <https://www.myprimitivemethodists.org.uk/content/chapels/hampshire/s-hampshire/sherfield-green-primitive-methodist-chapel>.

⁵² J. A. Manser and Son Ltd., *Builders: A history of J. A. Manser and Son Ltd., and the village of its origin*. pg 27, c1987 (full reference needed)

⁵³ *The Great River*, David M Young, Tentmaker Publications, 2016

⁵⁴ There are different streams of Plymouth Brethren, Christian Brethren, or simply The Brethren: Exclusive Brethren, Open Brethren, and Churches of God, with subdivisions especially within the first of these. The Exclusive Brethren formed a close-knit federation of churches, and usually adopted the name Plymouth Brethren, whereas the Open Brethren had a congregational form of church government and comprised autonomous assemblies such that they were often described as *Independents*⁵⁴. They tended to use the name Christian Brethren. This would have been the case for Sherfield. Probably, because of its autonomy, Sherfield does not appear in historical registers of Plymouth Brethren chapels, meeting houses, or the like, available on Plymouth Brethren websites which mostly or wholly refer to the Exclusive Brethren. So, information about the Brethren in Sherfield is limited to a few contemporary accounts and received memories.

⁵⁵ Posted at *Sherfield-on-Loddon Remembered* (Facebook)

House (Sherfield Hall), in the mid-1800s. Their account has been supplemented by information from local people and Internet sources.

In summary⁵⁶: in 1875 Baron Pigott changed his religious affiliation from Anglican to Christian Brethren⁵⁷. On finding that the one-roomed place where the community worshiped was too small, and, possibly too undignified for a Baron, he arranged for a hall, or Meeting Room as it was first called, to be built on the north side of the Cast Road or Causeway, now Goddard's Lane⁵⁸. It is shown on the OS 1896 map.

The humble meeting place which greeted Baron Pigott when he changed affiliation was a long shed built against the garden wall of the property next to Jackson's stores, opposite the White Hart, which at the time was occupied by a shoe mender, William Franklin (1833- after 1911). According to an account of village life by Kate Jackson (1897-1979)⁵⁹ this was still being used as a workshop by a shoemaker and his assistant in the early 1900s.

For five years prior to his conversion to Plymouth Brethren, Pigott had attended a Baptist Chapel, not necessarily Breach Lane Chapel but more probably Beech Hill Chapel, but it did not provide him with the religious experience which he was seeking. However, he did find what he was seeking amongst Plymouth Brethren, in the workshop of a cobbler!

Whilst the Meeting Room was being built, Baron Pigott died from a heart attack, the result of falling from his horse some weeks before. More details are given later. His daughter, Beatrice Barbara Pigott (1859-1947), inherited the hall. She worshipped there with the Bulpitts, Browns and other Sherfield families until her death. In 1946 Miss Pigott sold the hall to Percy Brown (1885-1965) and Gladys Mabel Brown (nee Jack) (1906-1992) who lived in 'Hillside' near the Village School.

The Christian Brethren, the name used by the Browns, continued to worship at the hall until 1975 and a vestige of the movement continued until 1987 with a Sunday School. After WWII, the hall, usually called '*The Room*', was also used

⁵⁶ Largely using the commentaries by Gladys Brown and Roland Brown.

⁵⁷ However, a letter written by Baron Pigott on 17th April 1875 after his accident, states that although he had frequented a Baptist Chapel for the five previous years it did not meet his spiritual needs, so would not have converted. Another letter, dated 23rd April 1875, four days before his death, describes his religious beliefs, understanding of the scriptures and the organisation of the church. *Two Letters written by the Late Baron Pigott after taking his place amongst the "Brethren"*, W.H. Broom, London, 1875, <https://books.google.com>.

⁵⁸ To the right of Rose Cottage on Plot 54 of the 1841 Tithe Map.

⁵⁹ *Sherfield on Loddon: The Founding of a Country Business*, (Margaret) Kate Jackson, unpublished manuscript c1948.

by, for example, playgroups, Scouts, Guides, St Leonard's Youth Club and the Evergreens.

However, in view of changing needs of the community and the prospect of significant costs in bringing the hall to modern standards, in 1987 it was sold, and the proceeds distributed to churches and charities in the village and further afield. The new owner, Brian Pyle, converted the hall to a home, now named Goddards Hall.

Whilst many older Sherfield residents fondly recall attending the Sunday School, accounts of the Chapel, its congregation and its services are sparse. Congregations were falling before WWII and post-war they declined further. The Brethren's services and activities were exclusive with little interaction with other religious groups⁶⁰ and some have remarked that the congregation were rarely involved with joint activities with the Primitive Methodist and Baptist Chapels, such as social events, parties and picnics for families. Possibly this was because, as a matter of course, Brethren kept their distance from those who were not Brethren and eschewed all forms of celebration. Although the Open Brethren, which best describes its congregation, may not have followed a daunting list of prohibitions as closely as the Exclusive Brethren, the actions of its members would have been informed by them.



Figure 14: Meeting Room & Mark Brown⁶¹, before 1927



Figure 15: Goddards Hall, 2020

⁶⁰ J. A. Manser and Son Ltd., *Builders: A history of J. A. Manser and Son Ltd., and the village of its origin*. pg 27, c1987 (full reference needed)

⁶¹ Mark Brown (1846-1927) father of Percy Brown. Posted at *Sherfield on Loddon Remembered*.

Baron Pigott's burial and a change in the Law

An important piece of village history relates to the burial service for Baron Pigott: a lawyer by training and Liberal MP for Reading 1860-1863, where he replaced his brother Francis, who had resigned as MP to become Lieutenant-Governor of the Isle Man. He too resigned his Reading seat, when appointed to the Court of the Exchequer in 1863⁶².

Lord Justice (Arthur) Gillery Pigott died at his home on 27th April 1875 from a heart attack precipitated by a fall from his horse about two weeks earlier. He was buried in the Parish churchyard on the 28th April.

At that time, by law, burials in the churchyard had to follow the Anglican rite. However, when the Rector, Reverend Alfred Gresley Barker, who had been on friendly terms with Baron Pigott, attempted to do so, Baron Piggott's son, Arthur Gough Pigott and other mourners, prevented the Anglican burial service being read over the coffin. The burial then took place at great haste, a service having been held earlier using the Brethren's rites. By all accounts there was quite a fracas in the church yard. The Rector sued the son, under the Brawling Act leading to a nominal £1 fine with costs⁶³.



Figure 16:
The Right Hon. Mr Baron Pigott
The Illustrated London News (1863)⁶⁴

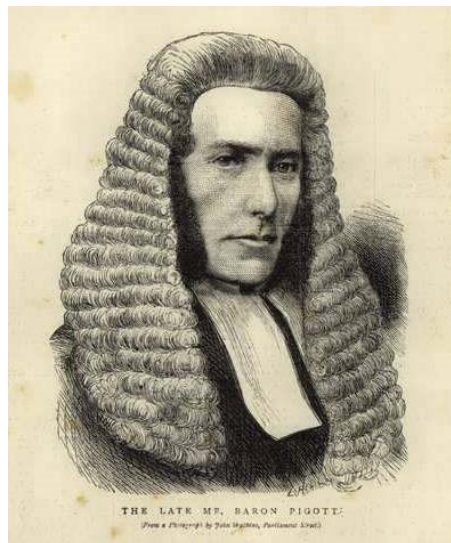


Figure 17:
Lord Justice Mr Baron Pigott (1813-1875)
The Pictorial World (1875)

⁶² Gillery Pigott, https://www.twtd.co.uk/wiki/Gillery_Pigott

⁶³ *The Disturbance at the Funeral of the Late Baron Pigott*, Reading Observer, 5th June 1875. A press report on a hearing on 2nd June 1875 at Basingstoke Magistrates Court, about the affray, brought under the Brawling Act (1553). Digital copies of the Hampshire Chronicle which would have carried reports are not available between 1871 and 1880 at <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>

⁶⁴ Images of Baron Pigott: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gillery_Pigott

Both sides were well prepared for a confrontation at the churchyard. Before the burial, each had consulted their lawyers about the legal position in relation to non-conformist burials in the parish churchyard, and at the funeral the Rector asked the wardens to hand Pigott's son "*a protest against the interruption of the rite of burial*".

William Gladstone, who became Prime Minister for the second time in 1880, and other MPs, were very disturbed by this high-profile case and similar events. Against much opposition, the law was changed by passing the Burial Laws Amendment Act (1880) to allow the saying of rights other than Anglican over the grave in the Parish churchyard⁶⁵. Even before then, the presence of a grave in a Parish churchyard was not an absolute guide to whether the occupant was a member of the Church of England. Afterwards it most definitely was not.

Conclusion

This inquiry into the Meeting House at Bowling's Farm has taken a thought-provoking path through the development of Christian worship in Sherfield on Loddon. It has revealed that the Meeting House, the first building specifically for Protestant dissenters in the village supported two communities, initially Independents and then Primitive Methodists, each of which became well-established and in due course moved to other premises.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect has been that of the role of the established church in issuing certificates permitting Meeting Houses to operate and through this process monitoring developments in the diocese. The investigation of the certificates highlights how prime movers, ministers and individuals, would provide support to each other in establishing new Meeting Houses, somewhat regardless of denomination. Pragmatism rather than theology provided the way forward, especially at a time when boundaries to beliefs were fluid and changing.

While Sherfield may have been rather out of touch with early developments which supported Protestant dissenters, as with the rest of the country, what appears to have been a vigorous awakening took place in the first half of the 1800s. By 1850 there were thriving communities supporting Independents, at Breach Lane Chapel, and Primitive Methodists at Bowling's Farm. Shortly afterwards, Breach Lane Chapel aligned with the Baptists, and a Meeting Room was built for the Brethren.

⁶⁵ *Parliamentary Debate on the Burial Laws Amendment Act, 1880*, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/acts/burial-laws-amendment-act-1880>

There is nothing much left in the village as reminders of what must have been exhilarating times for many villagers. The Meeting House at Bowling's Farm disappeared without trace, the Primitive Methodist Chapel closed and was incorporated into a house, and the Meeting Room is now a home, although at least some 'old timers' do remember attending Sunday School there. The important role of a Sherfield resident, Baron Piggott, in changing the law relating to burials is all but forgotten.

However, the Baptist Chapel does remain and it holds regular services. Although not strongly supported, it is still much loved, by the old timers, providing a connection to earlier times and generations. This delightful building is one of the few remaining visible reminders, both physical and religious, of the history of the village, of life in an agricultural community in the 19th and early 20th century, and of its spiritual awakening.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Lesley Mason and Ian Deepprose for information, encouragement and challenging an earlier draft; Geoff and Helen Belsham for information on Breach Lane Chapel.

ⁱ End Note: ***The Piddle by the Chapel***

The Tithe Award gives an area for the *Chapel and Yard* as 5 poles (0.03 acres) and that for the adjoining *Piddle by the Chapel* as 3 roods 39 poles (0.99 acres). The 1882 and 1891 auction particulars give 0.97 acres (3r 32p) for the whole (which is now Orchard Lea) although it retained the name, *Piddle by the Chapel*. The OS 1873 map gives 0.858 acres, although this excludes the *Chapel and Yard*, and the OS 1896 map gives a combined area of 0.931 acres. There is no obvious explanation for some of these small differences unless the plot boundaries had changed, or different methods of surveying were employed.

However, Ordnance Survey and property measurements can differ. OS measurements are to field boundaries such as hedges and do not include ditches on the far side of hedges which are often in the same ownership as that of the hedge. See, *The Ordnance Survey*, Edward Jolley Smith, The Journal of the Auctioneers' and Estate Agents' Institute of the United Kingdom, Vol 11, Part 12, December 1931.

Note: 40 poles or rods = 1 rood, 4 roods = 1 acre.