



Sherfield History Group

Mystery, Misery & Munificence

Peter Lansley

Breach Lane Baptist Chapel, Sherfield on Loddon

9th April 2026

Mystery, Misery & Munificence

Welcome

to a deep dive into the past!

An Adventure

A Mystery

Life was Tough

The Sherfield Pilgrims & Where They Met

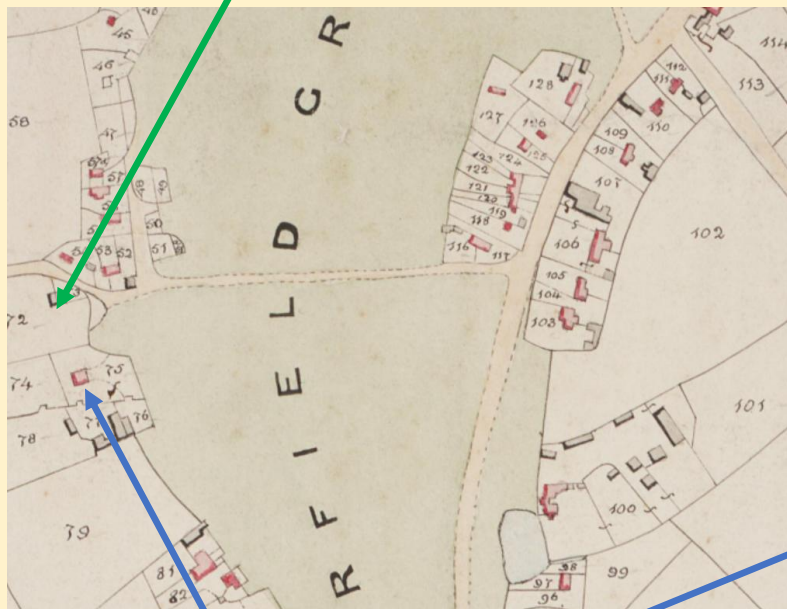
How Sherfield Changed the Law

Where Are We Now?

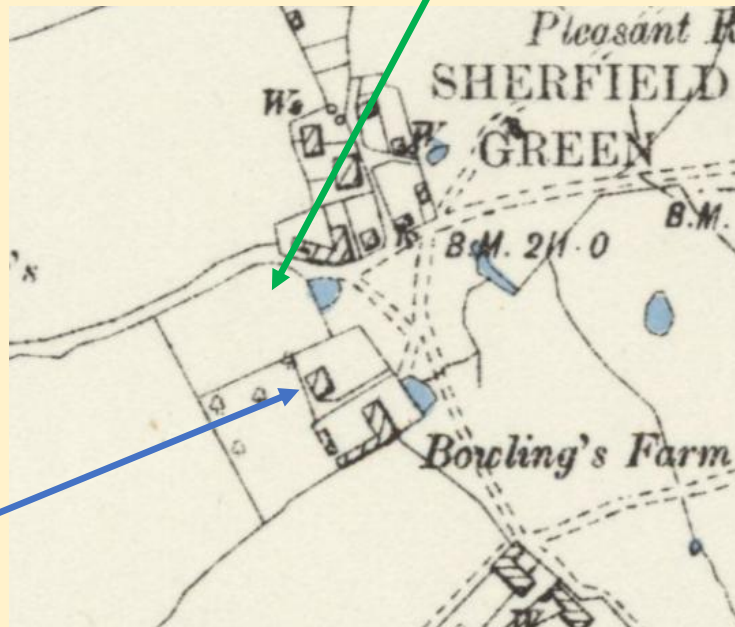
A Mystery on Sherfield Green

1841 Tithe Map v 1880 OS v 2000 Conservation Area Map

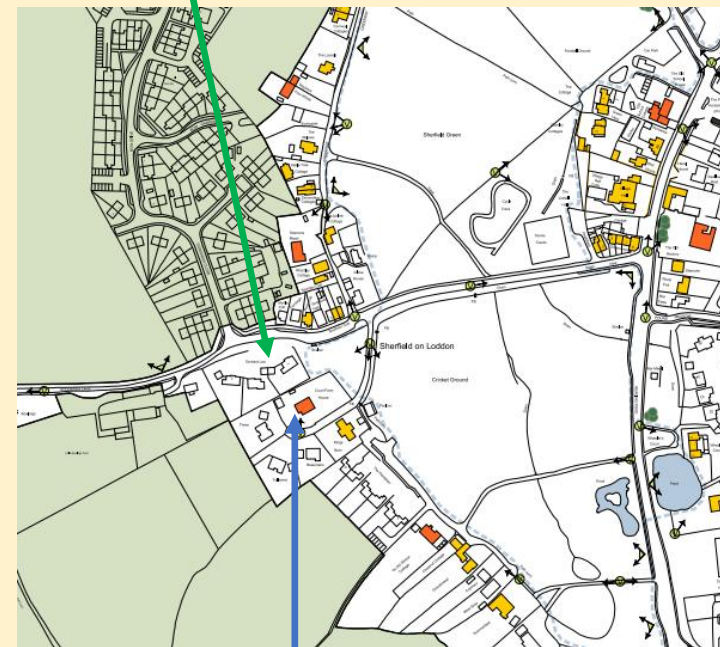
“Chapel”



Empty Piddle



1 Orchard Lea



Bowling's Farm House



Court Farm House

Memories and a Will

1990s Percy Sims (1919-2011) and Bob Bulpitt (1916-2014) mentioned the chapel.
Memories of their grandparents. But no others knew about it.

Donald Rickwood, born in Bowling's Farm House 1931:

"I ploughed the field in the 1950s.but nothing to suggest a building"



David Fenton owned Bowling's Farm c1814 to 1831.

A Meeting House mentioned in his **Will**.



David Fenton (1750-1831)
Rev James Wills (1784-1846)

David Fenton: A Scottish Linen Factor of Old Jewry, City of London; retired to Reading. **Very well off.**

A very Committed Dissenter –

Broad Street Independent Chapel (City of London)

Broad Street Chapel (Reading) *now Waterstones* →



*Reverend James Wills
Very popular and successful minister*

Son-in-law, **Revd James Wills,**
London Street Independent Church, →
Basingstoke (now URC)



Portico added 1860: The Palladium!



The Mystery



Why was the Meeting House built?

Who used it?

How did it fit into the lives of villagers?

Did Fenton build the Meeting House?

Did Wills preach there?



A Bishop's License & A Survey



Built in 1807

Certificate granted }
July 16. 1807. }
J. R. D. Regd. }

21-162/12/2/216
To the Right Rev. Father in God, Broulow,
by divine permission Lord Bishop of Winchester,
or to his next 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 appro-
priated for Antigenous worship, for the use of
his Majesty's protestant Subjects, departing
from the Church of England; according to
an Act of Parliament made in the first
year of the Reign of our late Sovereign King
William and Queen Mary entitled an Act
for exempting their Majesty's protestant
Subjects departing from the Church of
England, from the penalties of certain Laws,
as witness our Hands this 15 day of July
in the year of our Lord one thousand eight
hundred and seven -
Andrew Broulow Minister
Certificate granted }
July 16. 1807. }
J. R. D. Regd. }
John Cane
William Tapscott
John Savory
Alon Gaultney
James Gosling
Daniel Davis

1810 Survey

Parliament was very Troubled.

Impact of French Revolution (1789-99)
Was Established Church fit for purpose?
Rise of Dissenters and Meeting Houses

Sherfield – Revd John Eyre: “There is
a licenced meeting house for
Calvinistic Methodists, but it is not
supported, nor regularly attended by
any of the parishioners.”

Thomas Parker, owned farm 1791-c1814; leased
to local people. Lived in Reading, celebrated for its
Non-conformism. A request to build a meeting
house not at all exceptional.

To understand where we have arrived

Get Ready for some History Revision!



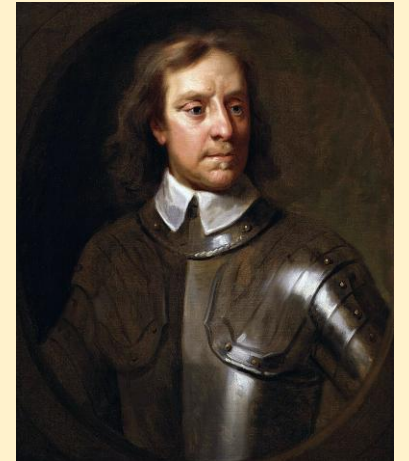
In the 1660s Life got Tough for Dissenters



16th century: Reformation : *Turmoil*
Protestants challenged the Catholic Church
Henry VIII, Thomas Cranmer & Thomas Cromwell

17th century : *Civil wars*

'Liberty of conscience' of Cromwellian period, encouraging religious freedom and diversity (whilst persecuting Catholics)



From mid 17th century : ***The Restoration Charles II, 1660***

The Established Church (Anglican), confronted by Protestant non-conformity: Quakers, Presbyterians, Independents (Congregationalists), Baptists,

**Royalists were intent on stamping out dissent:
*Catholic and Protestant!***



Ministers and the Law

Act of Uniformity (1662) All Anglican clergy forced to *accept* in full, the Book of Common Prayer *or be evicted*.

The Five Mile Act (1665) Dissenting ministers prevented from living in or visiting any place where they had previously served as ministers.

The Conventicle Act (1664) *Unlawful* for more than five people aged 16 and over, besides the household, to be present for religious worship other than according to the Church of England.



Dissenters and the Law

*Fine of
£20/month
& prison*



Elizabethan recusancy laws for **not attending church on Sundays**, or for failing to receive holy communion at least once a year.

Corporation Act (1661)
Roman Catholics and Non-Conformists **excluded from holding Official Positions**

Test Acts (1673 & 1678)
anyone holding public office had to take the sacraments in an Anglican Church.

Universities!

Teachers: licences granted only if they had taken the Anglican sacrament within the previous year.

For example, William Cover, schoolmaster, Hambledon, licensed 22 December 1762

Schism Act (1714)
preventing non-conformists and Catholics educating their children in their own schools.

On the day the Act was due to take effect, Queen Anne died. Her successor, George I, did not enforce it.

Repealed in 1719.

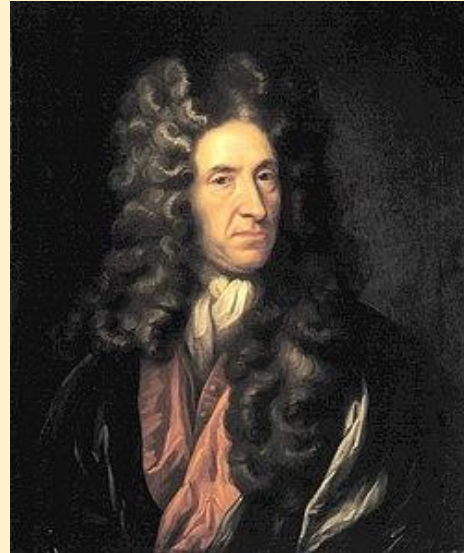
Imprisonment



John Milton (1608-1674)

Author of ***Paradise Lost***

1660 Warrant for imprisonment and burning of his works. Went into hiding. Relieved by a *General Pardon*, but then imprisoned; release secured by influential friends.



Daniel Defoe (1660-1731)

Satirist, Author of ***Robinson Crusoe***
1702 guilty of *Seditious Libel*. Three days in a Pillory and then Prison.
1703 release brokered by Robert Harley, 1st Earl of Oxford and Earl Mortimer (Herefordshire)



John Bunyan (1628-1688)

Baptist Preacher, Author of ***The Pilgrim's Progress*** and hymn ***He who would Valiantly be***
1660 Imprisonment 12½ Years.

Impossible to Impose a Uniform Anglican Faith



Declaration of Indulgence (1672)

Charles II, licencing of premises for dissenting services.

Withdrawn in 1673!

Catholic James II attempted a similar declaration, but was **ousted**.

The Glorious Revolution of 1688.



Toleration Act (1688) (William and Mary)

Allowed free worship of Protestant dissenters, although not Catholics.

Meeting Houses registered on application to the bishop of the diocese - a fee of not more than 6d.

Places of Worship Act (1812) reinforced the conditions & increased the maximum fee to 2s/6d.

Protestant Dissenters Act (1852)

Registration responsibility of the Registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths.

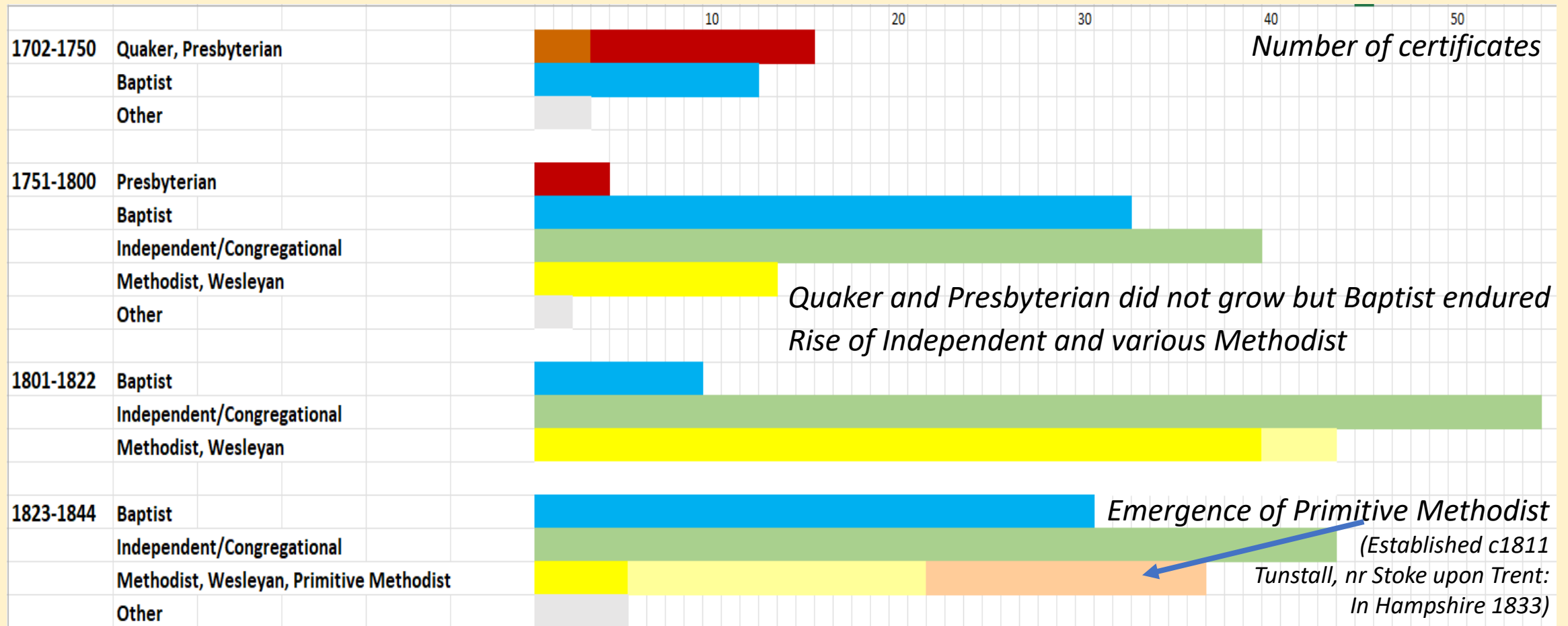
Places of Worship Act (1855)

Registration not mandatory, except for where marriages were to take place.

Meeting House Registrations 1702-1844

Winchester Diocese

Only 20% certificates indicate a denomination

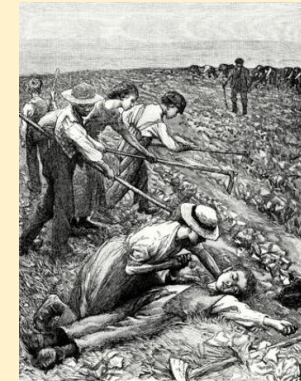


“In no English county was this opposition [to Primitive Methodists] more persistent and malignant than in Hampshire.”

The Rural Reality

A Spiritual Waste Land

Hampshire in the late 1700s, extremely rural and agricultural, populated largely by agricultural labourers: *“mostly illiterate, living in pitiful conditions, often close to starvation”* – William Cobbett.



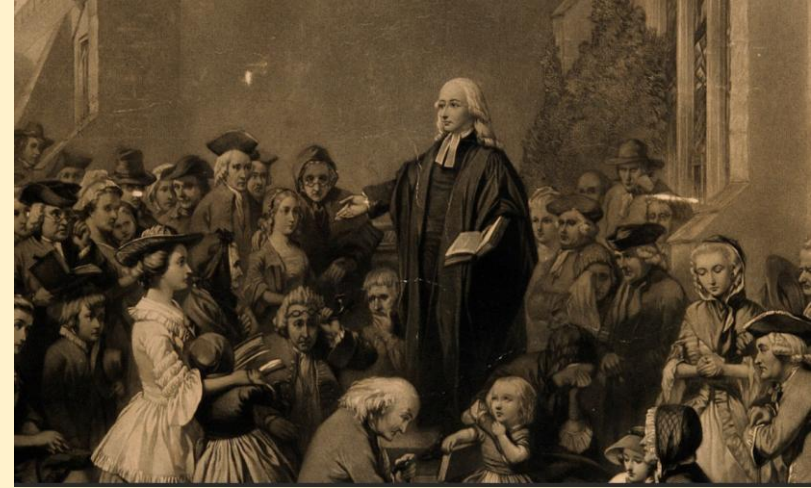
Kept in their place by the gentry and often the parson. Considered too worldly to benefit from religion. So, rarely went to church. They were not wanted there.

Basingstoke & the Villages

A Slow Awakening



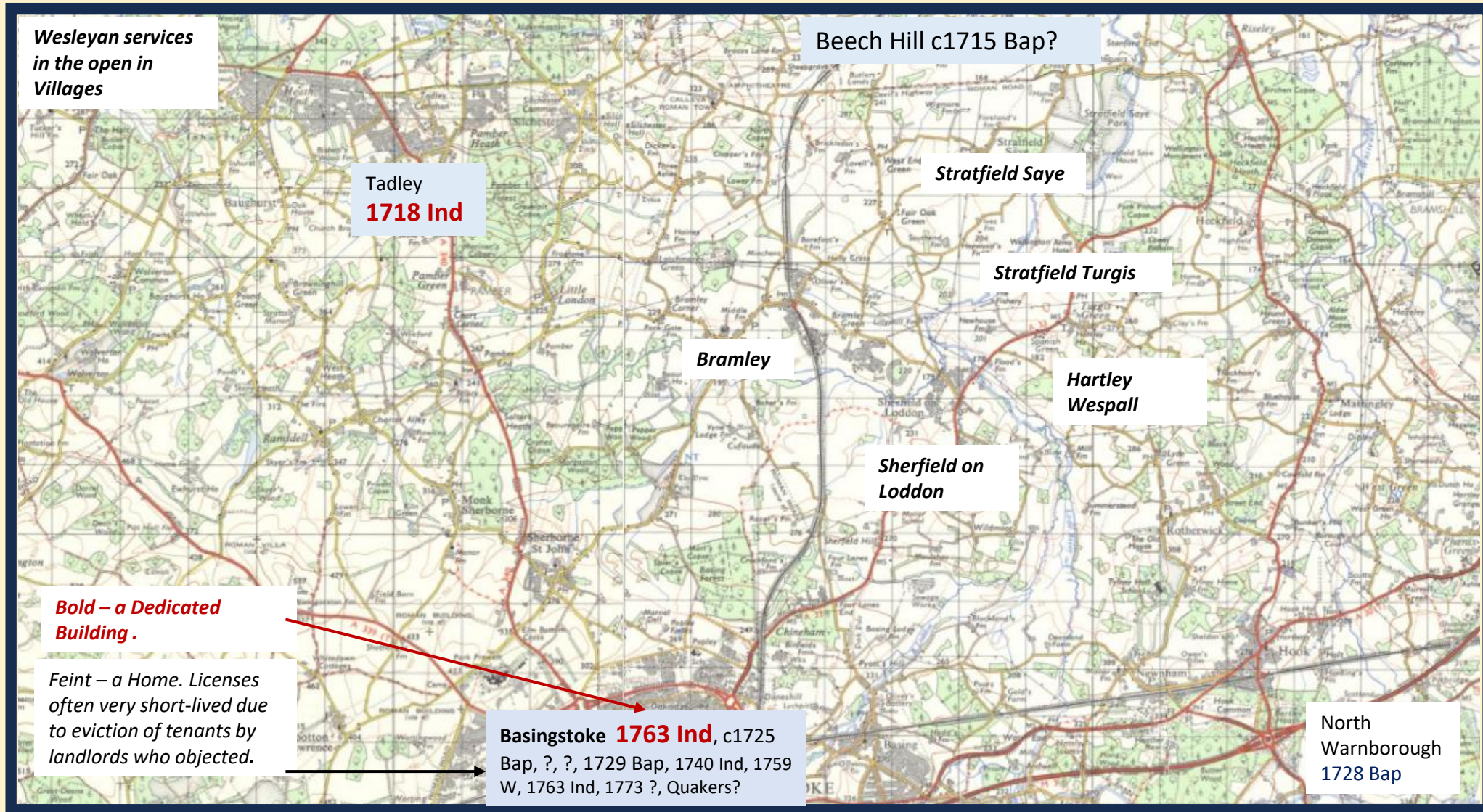
Mid 1700s. Wesleyans held meetings in the open. Some footholds but did not become established.



Late 1700s A few villagers, inspired by their own beliefs, by others, and orators visiting Basingstoke, **sought new opportunities well away from the Established Church.**

But Where could they go?

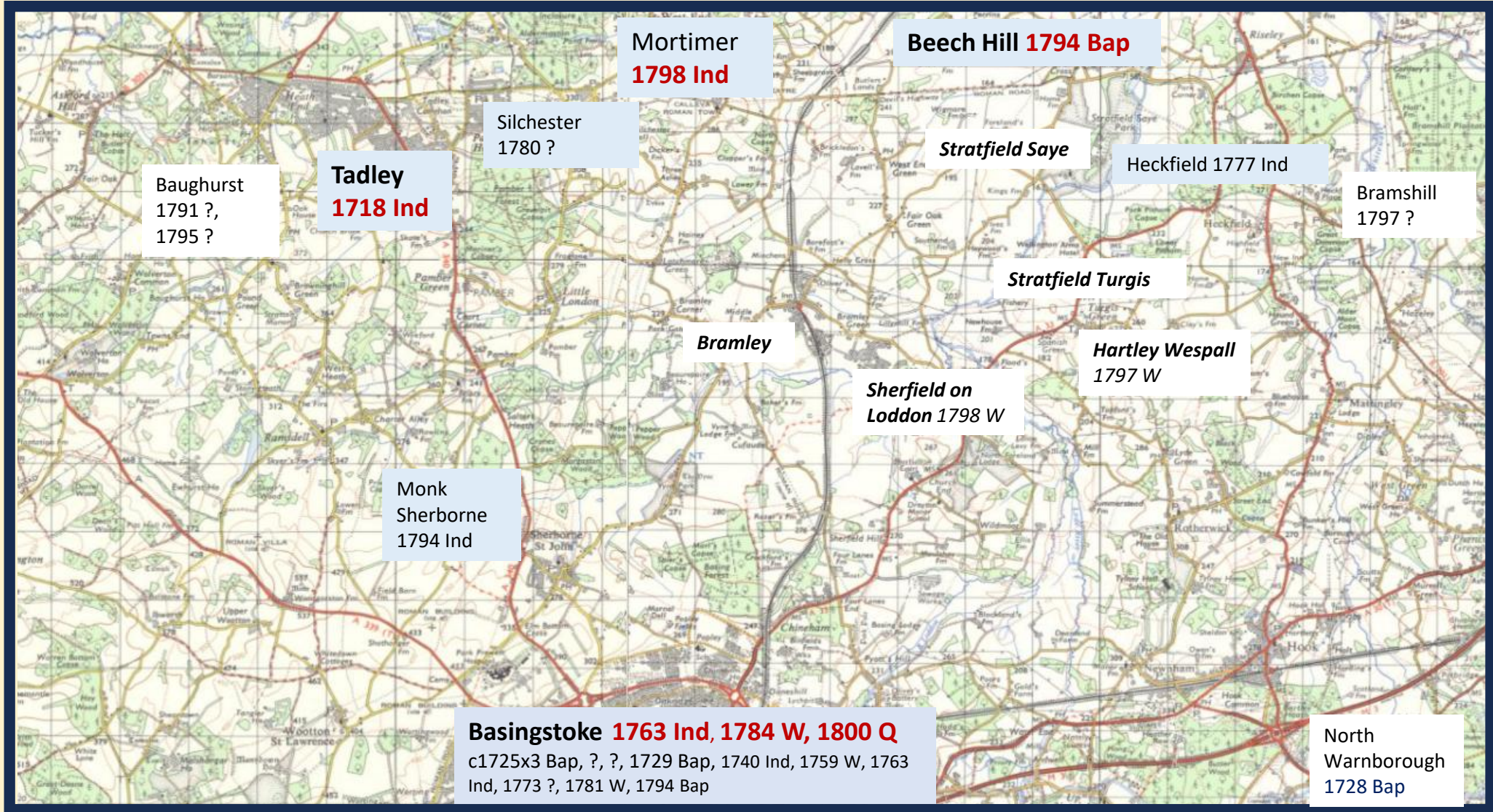
Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates - 1775; **Basingstoke Stirs**



Nearby parishes blue background; **Bold** a dedicated building, otherwise a house

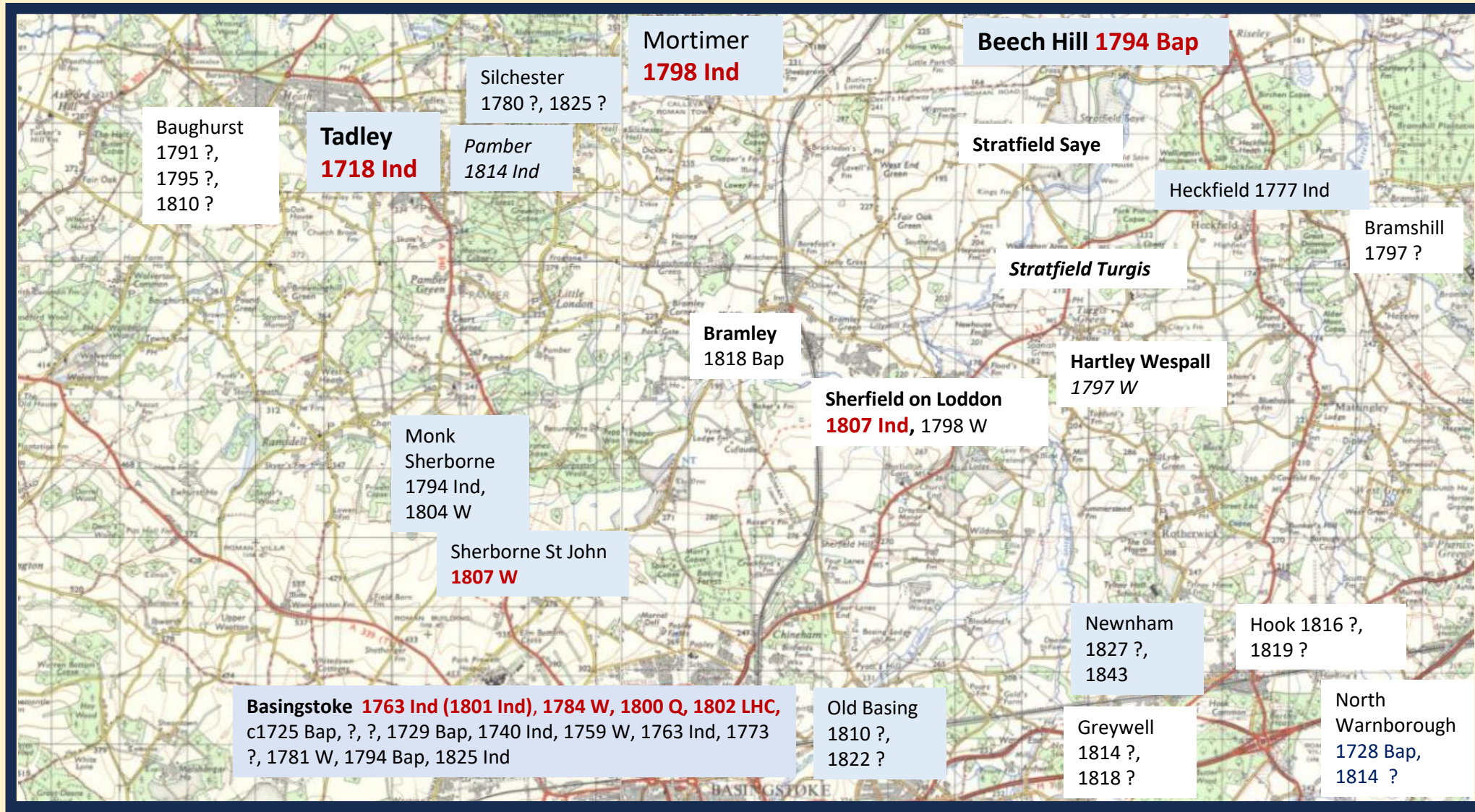
The Benefice: Sherfield, Bramley, Stratfield Saye, Turgis, Hartley

Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates - 1800. **Sleepy Villages**



Nearby parishes blue background; **Bold** a dedicated building, otherwise a house

Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates - 1825. An awakening?



Nearby parishes blue background; Bold a dedicated, building otherwise a house



The Meeting House at Bowling's Farm



Bowling's Farm Meeting House

1807 Independent
 1810 Calvinistic Methodist
 c1835 in decline
Meeting house abandoned.
 1842 Primitive Methodist
 1851 Thriving
 1866 Congregation moved to new chapel
 1870s No longer used, dismantled

Primitive Methodist Chapel

1866 Founded
 c1970 Services ceased, abandoned
 1986 Replaced by a house Hafod.

The Pilgrims

Until late 1820s : Community Action

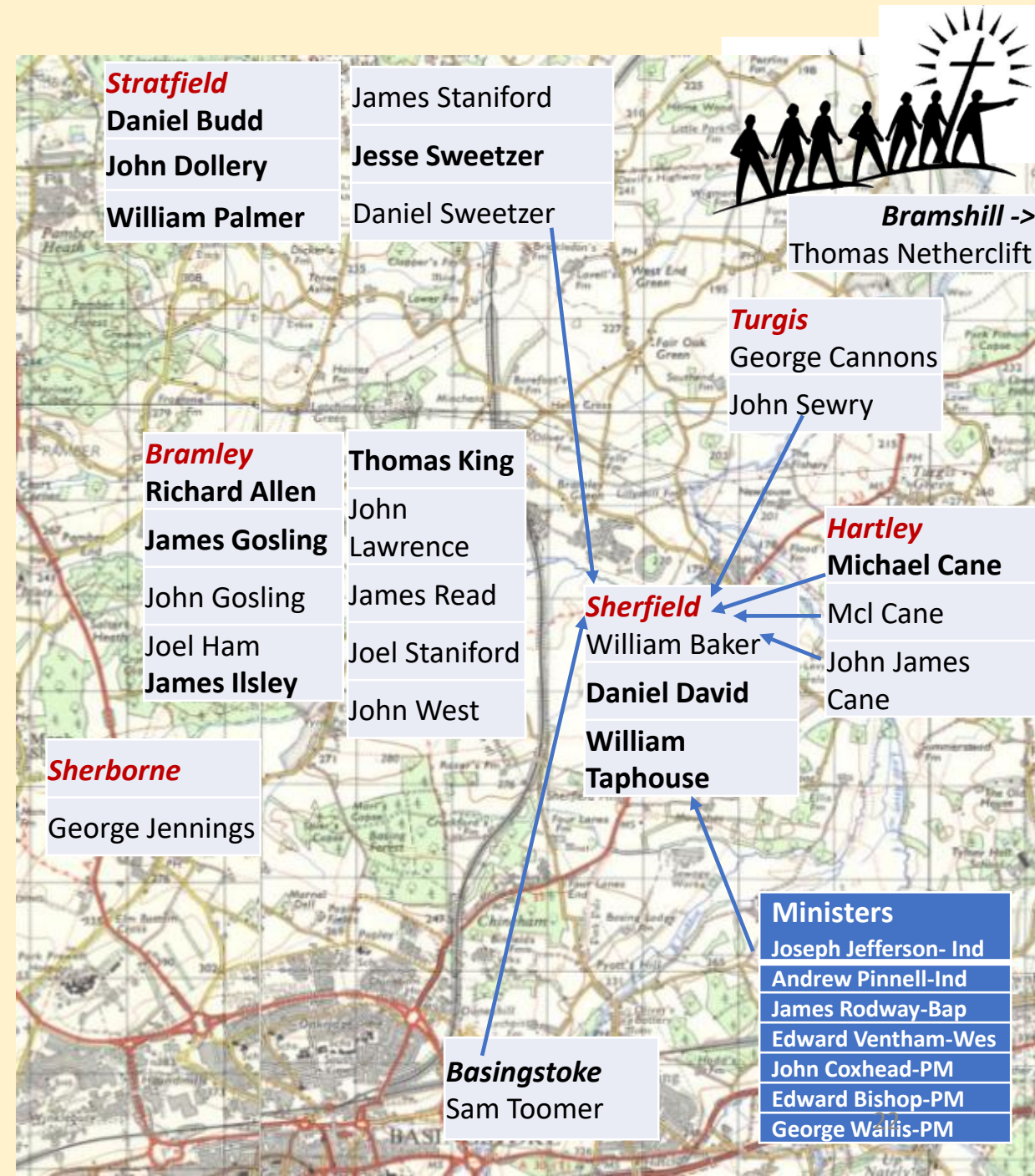
Six requests for certificates each with four to nine signatures:

*Farm Labourer 7, Farmer 6,
Cordwainer 3, Shopkeeper 2,
Schoolmaster, Carpenter, Poulterer,
Ironmonger, other 6*

With support from Ministers

Example, signatures on certificate for the first meeting house in Sherfield:
House of Daniel David (Wesleyan) 1798

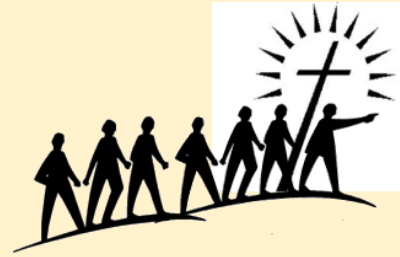
Those with names in bold licensed their homes as Meeting Houses.



A Sherfield Pilgrim

William Taphouse

Sherfield 1783-1836



When young, first religious conviction came from hearing an Independent minister in Basingstoke. But *“he was checked by uninformed advisers”*, and *“lived in perpetual fear of an awful end to his life”*.

1828 Heard the Wesleyans, probably in Basingstoke, converted, opened his house, became a local preacher.

1833 Opened his house to the Primitive Methodists for preaching. **Evicted!**

1835 Opened another house

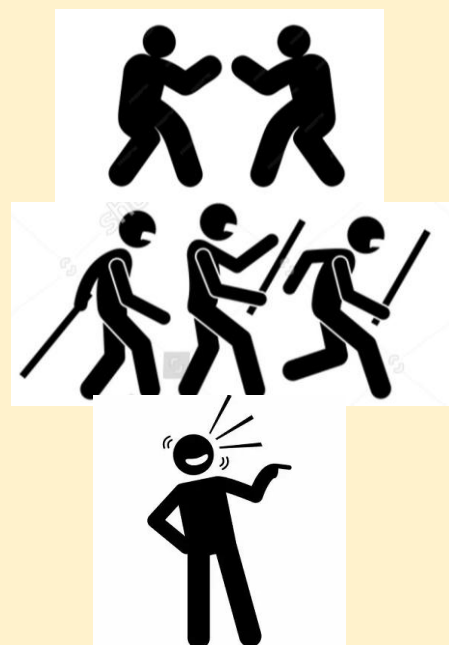
1835 Preached for the last time, on Sherfield Green

1836 Died, aged 53





Going as to War



Open-air Services

Fights

Pitched Battles

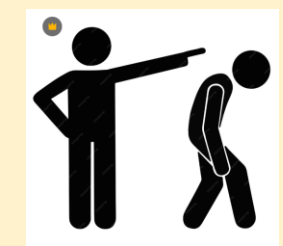
Ridicule

Licensing a Home

Harassment

Eviction

No Job



“At Old Basing he [John Bide, PM Minster] was thrice knocked down and trampled under foot, until his persecutors left him, thinking that life was extinct.” 1833.

1880s Major riots in Basingstoke

The Massagainians v The Salvation Army

Difficult for agricultural labourers in tied cottages

Easier for artisans with their own premises

c1827 Enter the Professionals

From late 1820s :

Facilitators took the lead – ten certificates in Benefice

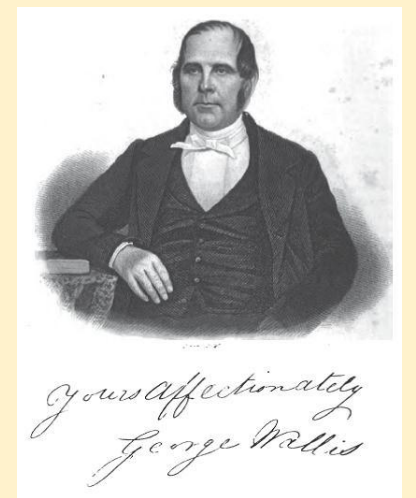
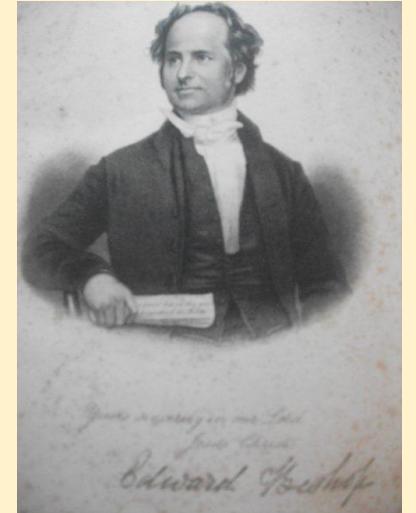
Fewer signatures : a Minister and the occupant

Edward Ventham, Umbrella Maker, Winchester,
Wesleyan

- 3 in Benefice

Edward Bishop, North Waltham, George Wallis, Andover,
John Coxhead, Moreton, **Primitive Methodist**

– 7 in Benefice



Requests were simple - 1720s

This is to certify that I James Kitchener of Basingstoke
Do humbly Desire A certificate According to Law for
the Exercise of the worship of God in my house
Wm Moth
In Spencer
Samuel Starker
John Smith
James Kitchener

This is to certify that I James Kitchener of Basingstoke
Do humbly Desire A certificate According to the Law
for the Exercise of the worship of God in my house

Wm Moth
In Spencer
Samuel Starker
John Smith

James Kitchener

29 words



Richard Willis
Bishop of Winchester
1723-1734
Humble background,
Devout, Scholarly,
Evangelical

But not simple in the 1800s



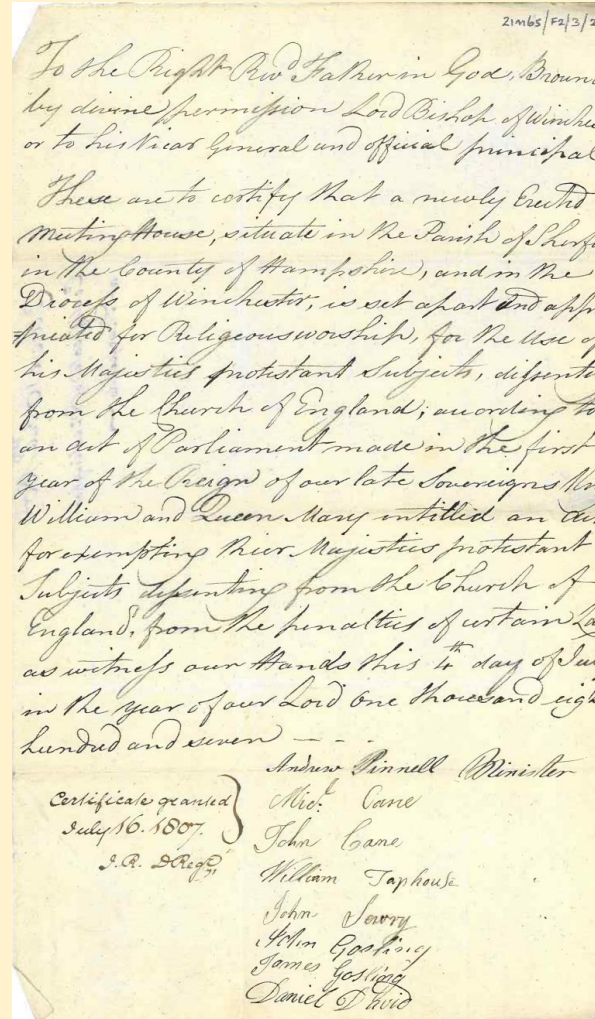
Brownlow North
Bishop of Winchester 1781-1820

Privileged upbringing
Influential family

Half brother - Frederick North, PM

Fast track career

Notorious for nepotism, supporting family members. "Not a good shepherd."



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.

Certificate
granted
July 16. 1807
I. R. D^{Reg}

Andrew Pinnell, Minister

Michl Cane

John Cane

William Taphouse

John Sewry

John Gosling

James Gosling

Daniel David

**Bowling's Farm
Meeting House
137 words**

But printed forms were available from c1812

Just fill in the spaces!

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

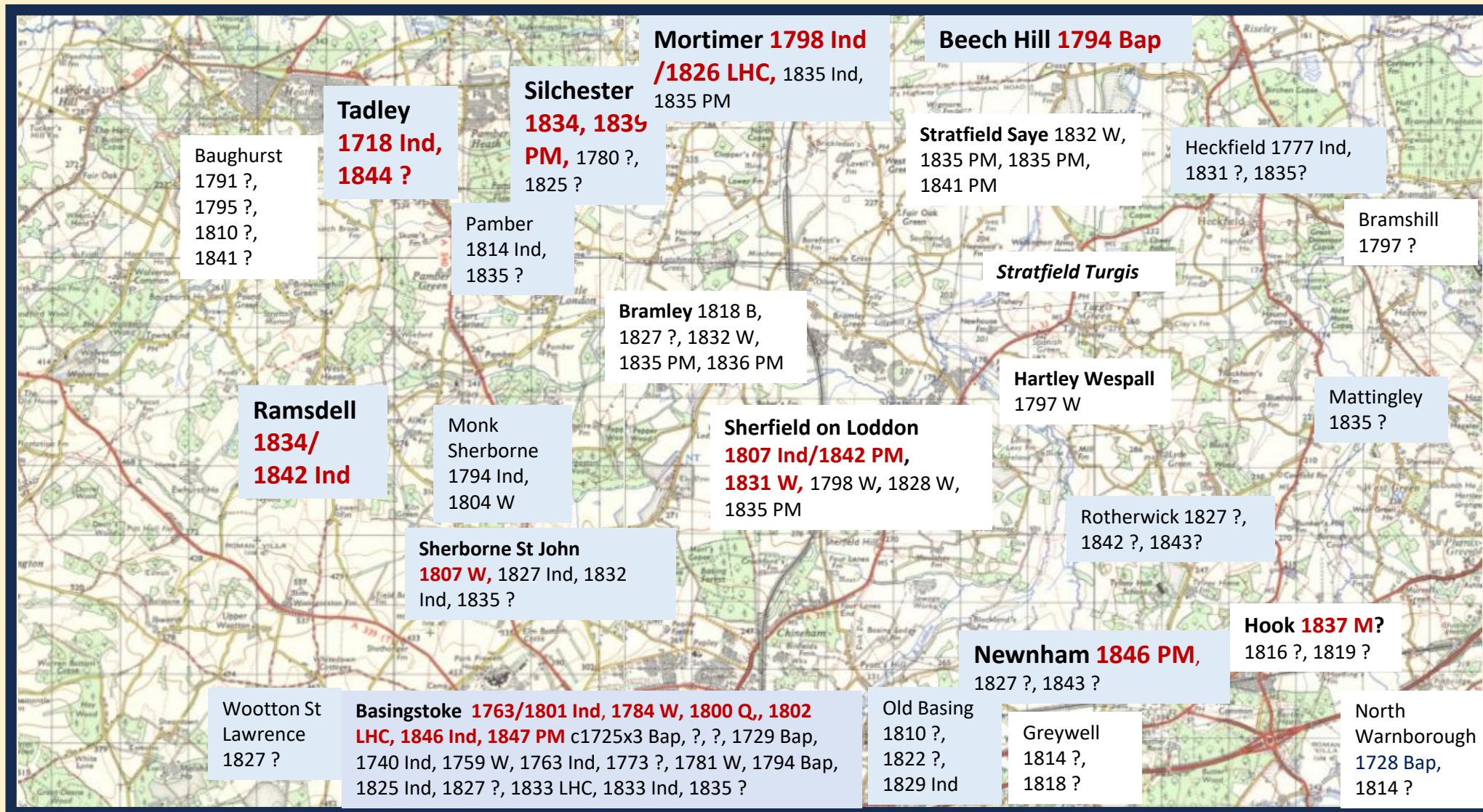
I *Edward Bishop*, of *North Waltham*, in the
Parish of *North Waltham*, in the County of *Hants*;
Do hereby Certify, that *A Dwelling House* and Premises,
situate at *Basingstoke*, in the Parish of *Basingstoke*,
in the County of *Hants*, and now in the holding and occupation of
Robert Moody, Hair Dresser;

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 an 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 which shall be taken no more than Two Shillings and Sixpence.
Witness my hand this *tenth* day of *November*,
in year of our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and *Thirty-five*.

Edward Bishop
Signed, Nov 10th 1835.
Robert Moody

Int: signed 10. Dec. 1835
ew

Dissenters' Meeting House Certificates - 1850. **An Explosion!**



Nearby parishes blue background; **Bold** a dedicated building, otherwise a house



Breach Lane Chapel (1831-1870)



Information on design awaited

Breach Lane Chapel

1831 chapel, built by **John Tubb, Breach Farm.**

Initially Wesleyan but
c1837 a 'falling out'.

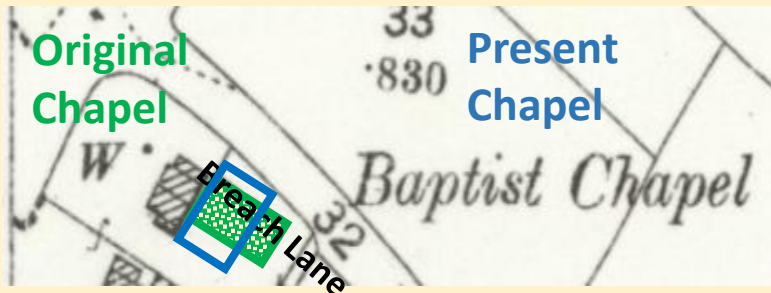
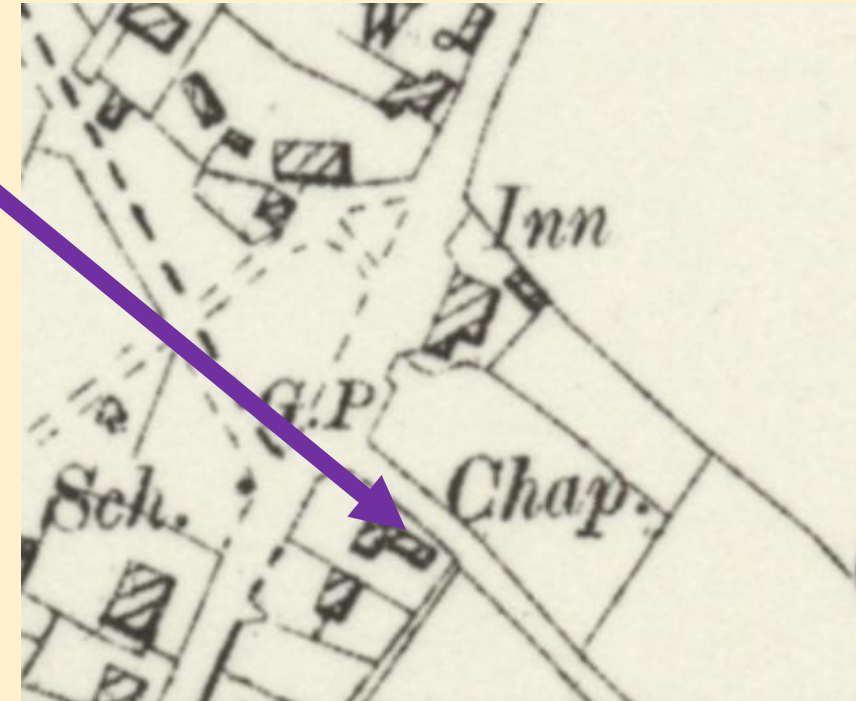
c1837 not active?

c1842 Independent with
Baptist influence

1851 **Very popular**

1854 Ownership passed to
niece of Mrs Tubb

1870 Board of Trustees



1883 Renovation (*gallery, pulpit & pews removed; replaced by platform & benches*)

1851 Religious Census

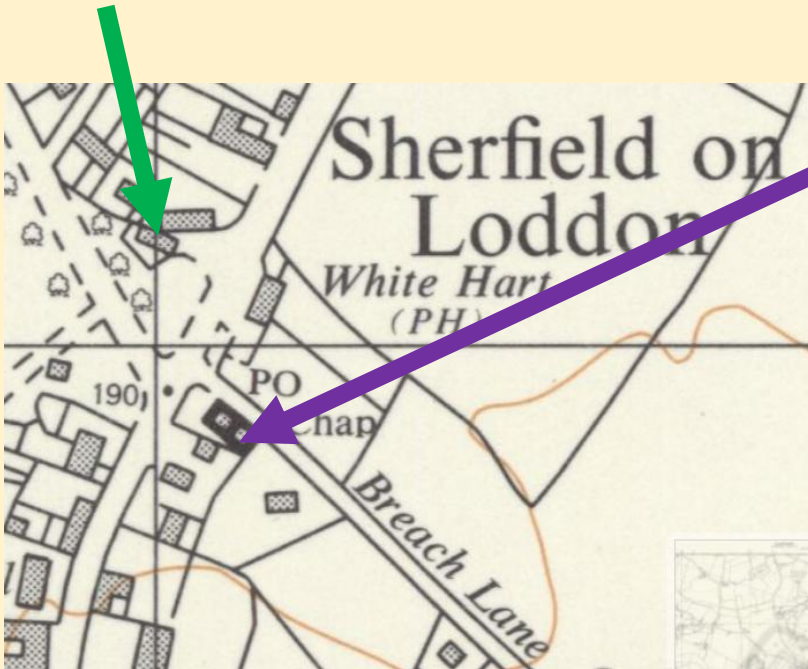
Concerned with places of worship, churches, chapels and meeting houses; ignored private homes.

Attendances All Services, Sunday 30th March 1851 – a very wet day

	Parish Church of England	Independent (Breach Lane)	Primitive Methodist (Bowling's Farm)	Population 1851 <i>(attend/pop)</i>	
Sherfield	90	269	191	615 <i>(0.89)</i>	Fewer than usual
Stratfield Saye	440			611 <i>(0.72)</i>	Reduced numbers owing to unfavourable weather
Bramley	333			495 <i>(0.67)</i>	On account of the weather, lower than usual attendance
Hartley Wespall	280			353 <i>(0.79)</i>	
Stratfield Turgis	114			245 <i>(0.47)</i>	Large number of children arrived so wet, sent straight back home

Breach Lane Chapel (1871 onwards)

Jackson's Store

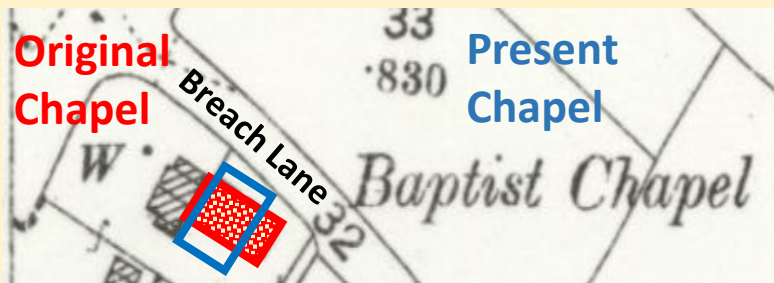


1870 Trustees steer towards Baptist. **Henry Jackson** – c1836 onwards, Shopkeeper in Sherfield, Very Influential.

1924 Chapel **rebuilt**
(*Jackson Memorial Chapel*)

2027 Despite some breaks in the early 2000s

Baptist Services continue



Important Role in the community: examples:

c1948 Baby Clinic

1950s So strongly supported – marquee in field opposite!....

1978 - c2015 – hosted Roman Catholic Services!



So, what did people gain from attending these chapels?



More than religious devotion with others

Relief from drudgery & isolation

Smartening up

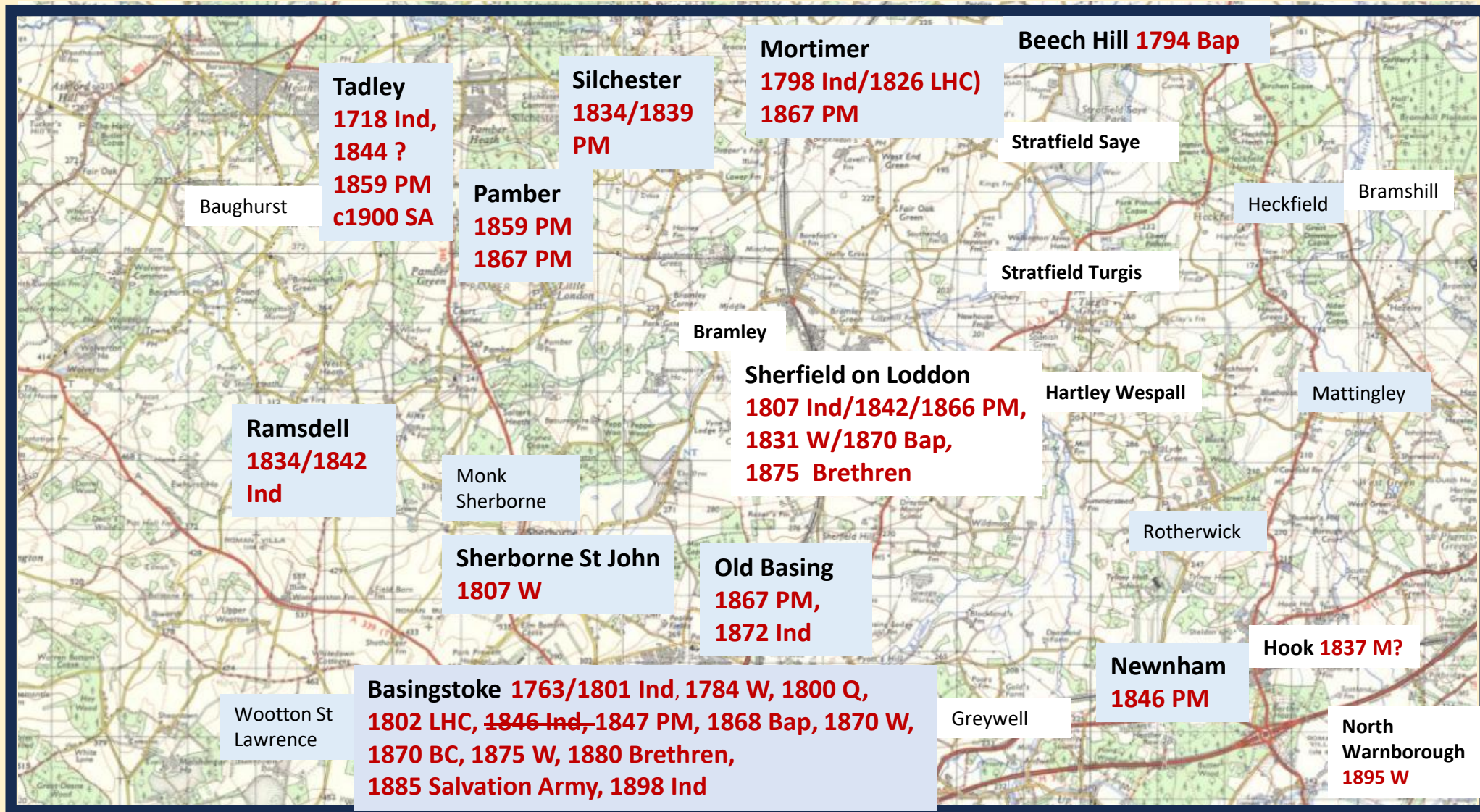
Music

Thoughts

Freedom from hierarchy & rigid expectations

Socialisation and a new society & way of life

Non-Conformist Chapels - 1900. Maturity



Nearby parishes blue background; Dedicated buildings only. No houses indicated



Brethren Meeting Room

(Plymouth/Christian Brethren)

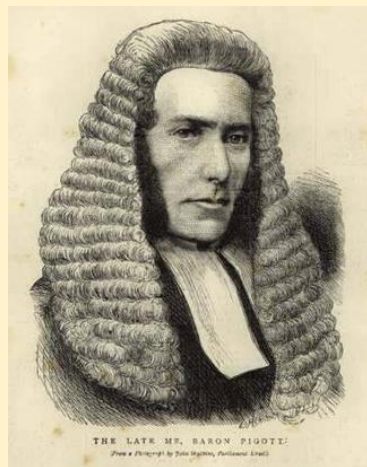
The Meeting Room

c1870 Brethren met in a shoemaker's workshop
1875 Baron Pigott joined
1876 Brethren Meeting Room built by Baron Pigott
1975 Services ceased, but Sunday School, community activities, Lunch Club, Evergreens etc continued.
1987 Building needed renovating. Sold, converted to a house (Goddards Hall).





How a Death in Sherfield Changed the Law



Lord Justice Arthur Gillery Pigott

of Sherfield Hill House

Lawyer, MP Reading 1860-63, Baron of the Court of Exchequer 1863

Became a Plymouth Brethren 1875

Died 27th April 1875: heart attack caused by a fall from horse.

Buried in Parish Churchyard a day later



The family refused the obligatory Anglican burial rights. A confrontation and fracas ensued.

The press were out in force. *“He was buried with indecent haste”.*

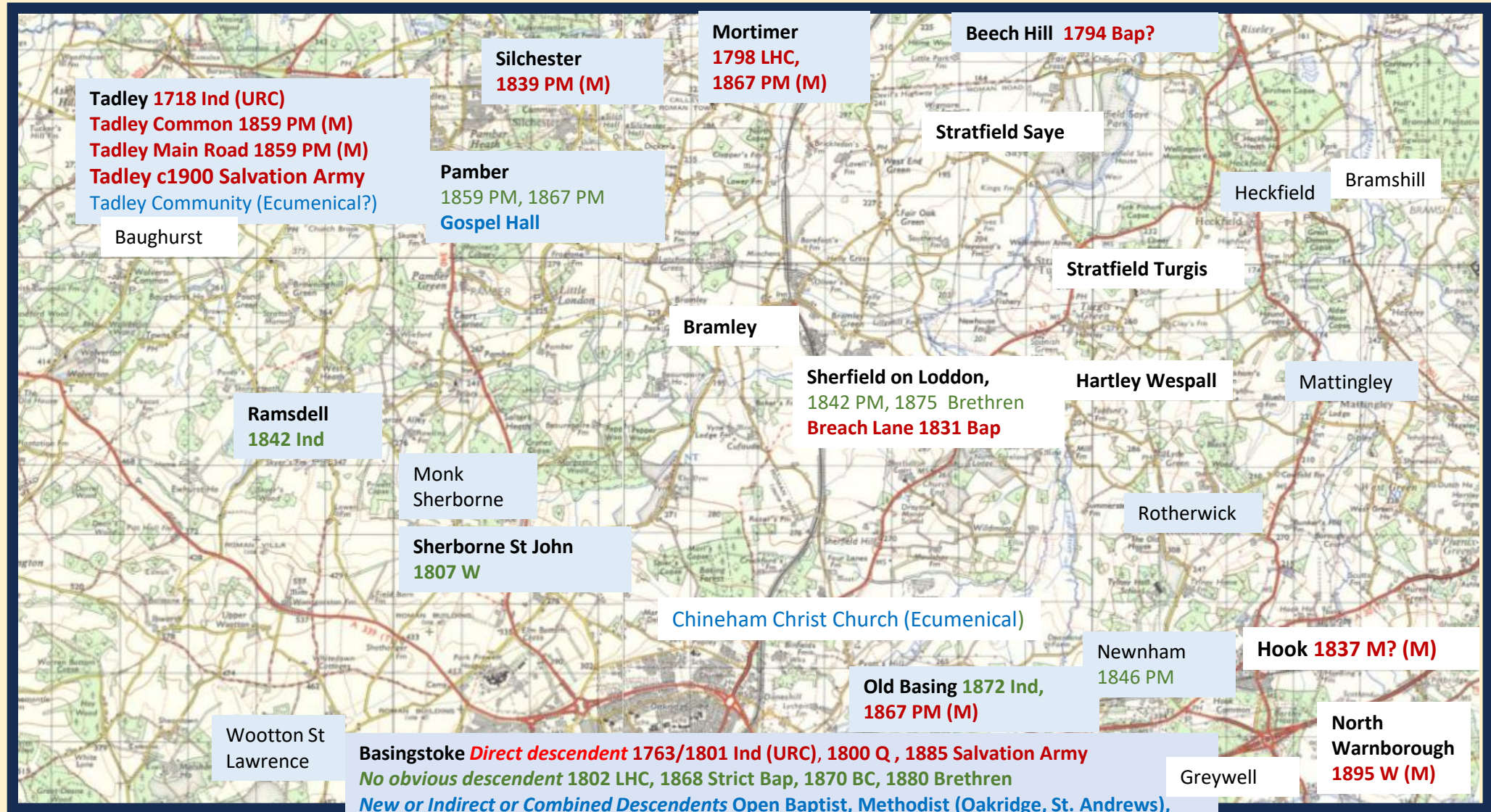
The Revd Alfred Gresley Barker sued Pigott’s son under the Brawling Act - fined a nominal £1.

William Gladstone, PM, very disturbed by this high-profile case.

Against much opposition, the ***Burial Laws Amendment Act (1880)*** allowed the saying of rights other than Anglican, over the grave in the Parish churchyard.

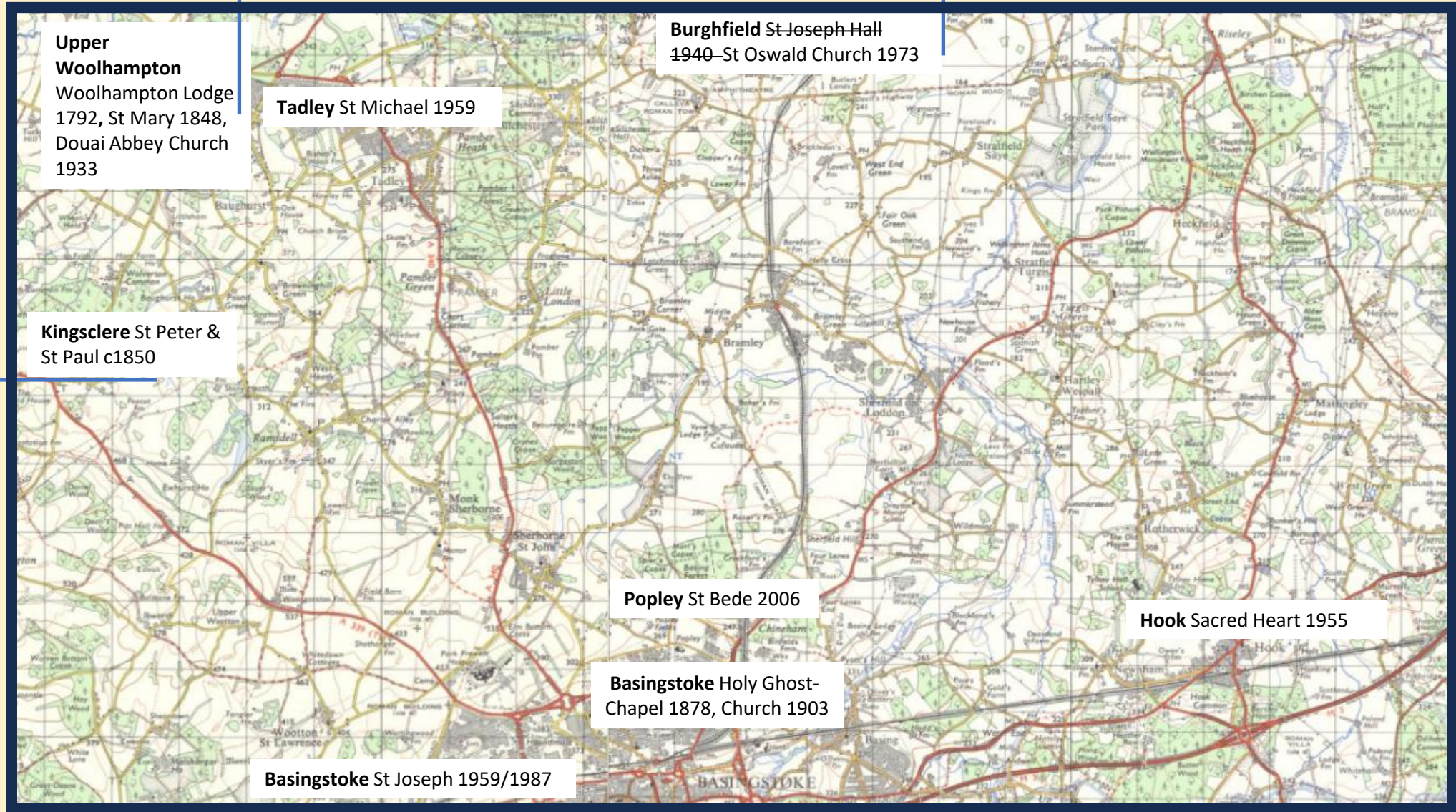
Where Are We Now?

Non-Conformist Chapels 2026.



Established prior 1900 (Denomination at 1900 shown)! Blue established since 1900. Ceased?
Incomplete especially for Basingstoke – not least because of Impact of Redevelopment of town centre

Catholic Churches 2026



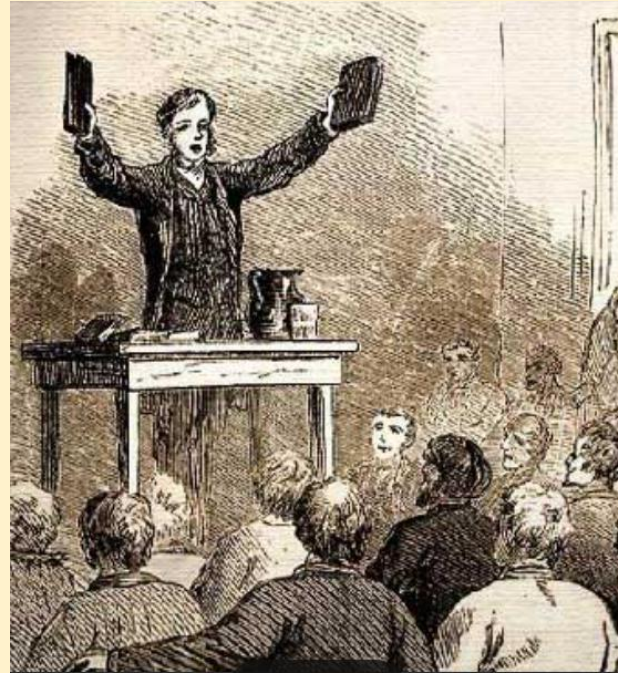
c1800 the few Catholics in Basingstoke took Mass at Woolhampton (12 miles);

c1850 priest from Woolhampton said Mass in homes, and later at Jasmine Cottage, Sarum Hill and “The Wagon and Horses”.

Mystery, Misery & Munificence

The **Mystery** Chapel - revealed much more than ever bargained for: A history of protestant dissent; and the first big step in establishing Non-conformism in the villages directly north of Basingstoke.

Sherfield: Three chapels.



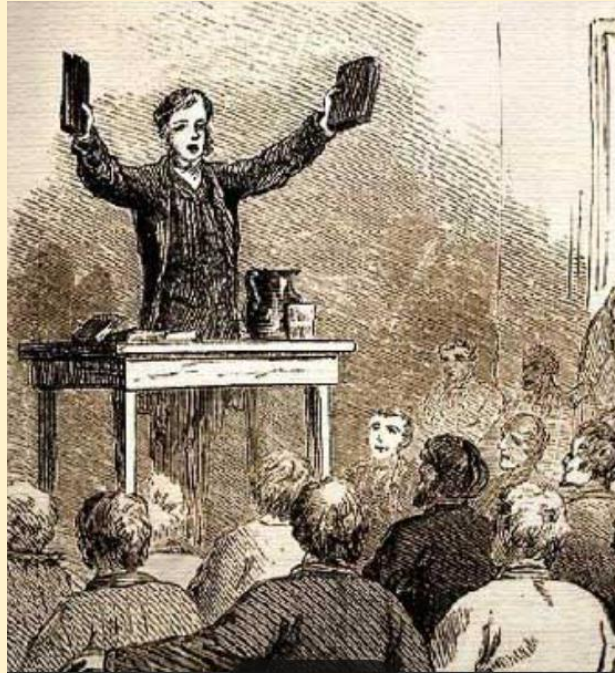
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Breach Lane Baptist Chapel

The only remaining link in Sherfield to a golden age of significant and sustained advances in society and belief.



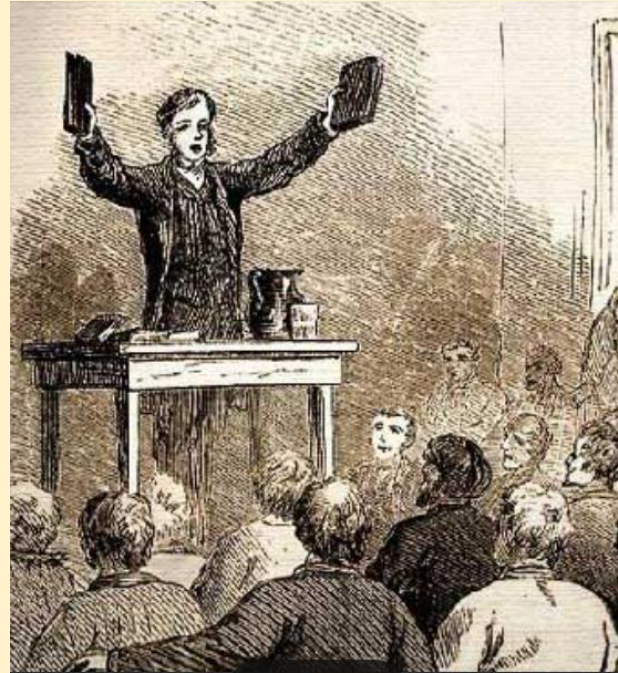
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Munificence

The **contribution** of those who despite the **personal risks**, worked across denominational, village and social boundaries, and with the **encouragement** of ministers, built a new way of 'being', and a new society.

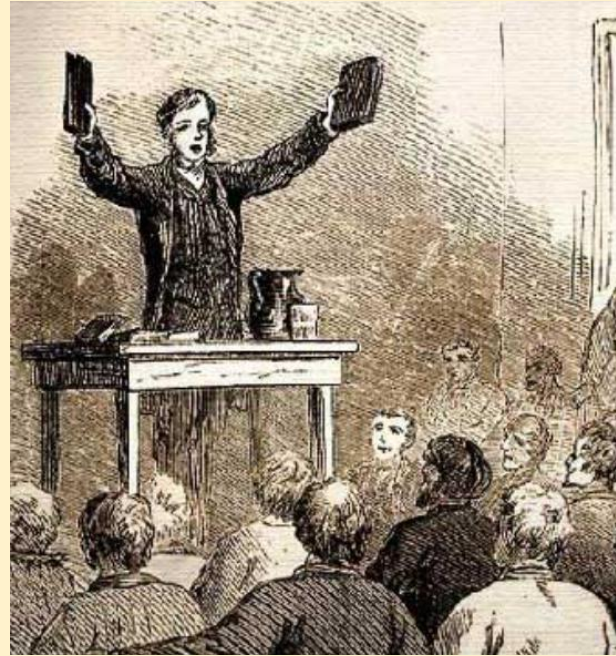
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The **contribution** of those who despite the **personal risks**, worked across denominational, village and social boundaries, and with the **encouragement** of ministers, built a new way of 'being', and a new society.

Agricultural labourers could no longer be taken for granted nor kept in their place. They created a new society in which many could thrive.

A life of Misery was no longer inevitable.



Mystery, Misery & Munificence

*Body and Soul
Misery and Mystery:
in Sherfield Old
Forgotten History
of Pilgrims bold
and their Victory*

Thank goodness for Breach Lane Chapel!

Sherfield History Group

The extensive information gathered by the Group can be found at:

<https://tinyurl.com/2s3vsftt>

This evening's presentation will be posted there tomorrow, along with supporting information.

An announcement including this link, will be made on Facebook - *Sherfield on Loddon Remembered.*