



Gosberton's Baptist Church is nearly three centuries old

THE BAPTIST CHURCH at Gosberton is one of the oldest of the village churches of its denomination in Lincolnshire. It was established in 1666, the year of the Great Fire of London, although there is no authentic record of the date of building the first church.

Gosberton was linked for worship with Spalding, and possibly the congregation worshipped in a suitable private house in the village or went to Spalding until they had their own church.

The preachers, not conforming to the general religious doctrines of the country, were often imprisoned, but this did not lessen their zeal. It was an age of intolerance, and religious persecution was a common practice.

Two buildings

The Baptists' first church still stands next to to-day's place of worship, and was in constant use until 1866 when the present church was built to commemorate the 200th anniversary. In the old church there is a gallery erected in 1829 to accommodate the Sunday School scholars. The inclusive cost of the gallery, raised by subscription, was £24 10s.

The old church is used to-day for mid-week meetings, and by the Sunday School.

Next to the old church was the Manse, the home of the resident minister. This building was demolished two years ago.

In May, 1865, plans were considered for the enlargement and alteration of the chapel but later in the year

DATES FROM 1666

that some had made application to inter their relatives with a view to saving expense. As the ground was small, the members felt that "it is believed that if we go on without making some regulation of a restrictive kind there will be no room for those whose interest it was more specially designed."

It was finally agreed that all members, their husbands or wives, and children under 14 years of age, should be interred free of expense, by paying 5s. to the minister and 2s. 6d. to the sexton. Others would be buried but the fees would be: first interment, 13s. 6d.; subsequent interment, 4s. 6d.; grave stone, 10s. 6d.; the minister's and sexton's fees to be the same as paid at the parish church.

Written records of church meetings date back to April 30th, 1784, when we are told: "It was agreed that as several members of the society who are disorderly and negligent in not attending public worship and divine ordinances, we appoint Thos. Fant, minister; William Crain and John Bartel, deacons, to attend to-

deacons and an elder, appointed by the church members look after the business affairs of the church.

Complaints

When a complaint about the conduct of a member was made at a church meeting, two or three were appointed to investigate the matter, interview the offender, and report to the next meeting. If the complaint was justified, the member was usually excluded from church, and had to mend his ways before being re-admitted.

In 1828, the church meeting considered the case of the caretaker. He lost his job because he was found guilty of "ill-treating his wife, manifesting a principle of dishonesty in not paying his just debts, in not striving to provide for the necessities of his family." It was concluded that he gave sufficient evidence to them that he was more concerned with worldly pleasures.

At the same meeting a charge of fraud was named as a prevalent report against a member. At the next meeting, the caretaker applied for his job again, but was refused. The other member had been found not guilty of fraud, but had acted with imprudence, and he was cautioned against such conduct in future.

The above picture is of the chapel, and also of the cottages belonging to it (which are now demolished). The chapel stands on the main road approaching the Five Bells cross-roads from Spalding.

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were made to hold mid-week meetings in the Risegate, Westhorpe and Quadring Eaudyke, and in 1826 a Sunday School was started at Quadring. Surfleet was suggested as a site for a church but the proposal was not followed up.

The Sunday School, according to the written records, was commenced in 1812 by Miss A. Clark. A printed bill of 1896 states the 84th Sunday School anniversary in that year, but the 84 has been deleted and 107 inserted. This implies that the Sunday School was started in 1789. Claim is made locally that it is the oldest in the village.

In January, 1815, Brother Bampton preached at Sutterton on Sunday morning and at Gosberton in the afternoon and evening. In February he began to preach at Gosberton on Thursday evenings, and the evening previous the children of the Sunday School were met by their teachers and Bro. Brampton for the purpose of instructing them in the art of reading and writing and also to give them some religious instruction.

During many years in the early part of last century, the total church income was usually about £40. One year's accounts state the income as £38 10s. and expenditure, including minister's salary, £38 1s. 9d. In another the figures were: £42 17s., expenses, £39 2s.

£40 a year

The details for one half year were: Income, contributions, £11 10s., public collec-