

Queensway Chapel History

The Church now meeting at Queensway Chapel, Melksham started in 1924. It was originally known as *The Christian Assembly* and met in rented premises from 1924 until the Chapel was opened officially on 8th April 1967.

Beginning in 1924 under the leadership of Mr Charles Arnold, Sunday services were held in The New Hall, Market Place. In 1939 *the Assembly* moved to premises in Watson's Court, High Street. In 1942 it moved once more, this time to The Friends' Meeting House in King Street which had formally belonged to the Society of Friends (Quakers).

After World War II the congregation continued to grow, often boosted by National Servicemen stationed at the nearby RAF camp at Bowerhill, and it was at this time that Mr Wallace Arnold and Mr Gordon Hollingsworth became increasingly involved in the leadership of *The Assembly*. In 1958 a Building Fund was started as the result of the Elders' vision to have their own premises.

In 1959, the sale of The Friends' Meeting House resulted in another move, this time to Old Bank House in Bank Street (a former bank, now replaced by shops). In 1963, the demolition of Old Bank House necessitated another move - this time to The British Legion, King Street. Services were held upstairs in the old cottage (now made into flats) until the Church moved to its present home, *Queensway Chapel*, in 1966.

Negotiations for a plot of land began in 1960, resulting in the acquisition of the present site in Pembroke Road (at the Junction with Queensway). Originally, the planners had earmarked this location as being reserved for a Public House!

The site was used for two tent missions while funds were accumulating sufficiently to commence building. Architect Mr Sydney Brown of Bath drew up the plans which were passed in July 1963 and building started in January 1965.



The bare site, January 1965



Raising the arches

Arthur Evans was employed as a mason for the main stonework, Bert Daniells acted as Clerk of Works and Wallace Arnold oversaw the whole project. The majority of the work was carried out by church members and friends from other churches. Local residents, observing the work, witnessed an impressive feat - the raising of the portal arches by sheer manpower!

The first services were held on Christmas Day 1966 and were attended by about 30 members. The "official" opening Thanksgiving Services were held on Saturday 8th April, 1967. These were attended by about 200 people - friends who had an interest in the project, many of whom had provided financial support or who had given practical help with the building work.



The newly completed chapel

A Sunday school had been held at Lowbourn Junior School since December 1958. With the new Chapel building, interest increased and by May 1968 there were 80 children attending each Sunday.

Activities for older children were started - "Covenanters" (renamed "Word Up" in 2000) and "Young People's Fellowship" (YPF was renamed "FUSED" in 2008). Consequently, as numbers grew, more space was needed. Gerald Woodland kindly allowed the hire of his premises (Queensway Hall, opposite) for an hour on Sunday mornings for Covenanters to meet. In January 1972 a permit was granted to erect a temporary hut (the legendary "Green Hut"!)

in the car park for youth work. By the mid-1970s the need for the Chapel to be extended became obvious. The architect John Catalini of Devizes was commissioned and plans for the extension were passed on 3rd August 1978. Building work commenced in April 1979 with four retired men in particular spending endless hours on the project (the "famous four" being Ernie Sawyer, Earl Fell, Bert Daniells and Wallace Arnold).



Building the Green Room

The work was finished by the end of 1980 and from January 1981 the 'Green Room' (as it came to be known, due to its green carpet and paintwork) was soon in constant use for youth work, teas, coffee mornings, etc. In 2008 it was renamed the 'Fellowship Room' after it was redecorated in magnolia to give it a brighter and lighter feel.

In March 1982 the Play-group was started by Georgina Hollingsworth. Later, this was taken over by Ann Arnold and, under her leadership, subsequently developed into "Queensway Chapel Pre-school".

The congregation grew steadily during the 1980s and it was realised that the Chapel building itself needed to be enlarged. Plans for an extension were submitted in 1991 and planning approval given on 27th February 1992. Building work started in June 1992 with the congregation meeting for Sunday worship in the "Green Room" until its completion.

Chris Sealy had oversight of the building project. Added momentum was given by a "Spring Build" week from 12th to 17th April in 1993 (an occasion still holding fond memories).



Opening celebrations

Another special push was made in the autumn of 1994 to ensure that the project was finished by Christmas.

The first services using the extended main hall were held on 18th December 1994. It was a great joy to see the Chapel filled on that day to celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus and to thank God for his goodness and faithfulness over the years.

On 19th January 2003, we were received into full membership of the Melksham Family of Churches at the annual Covenant Service. This took place at the Melksham (C of E) Parish Church of St. Michael's and All Angels. Prior to this we had been associate members. At that time, this brought the number of churches in full membership of the 'family' to 9 of the 12 churches in Melksham.

The picture shows Queensway Chapel elders, Robin Henderson (left) and Stuart Arnold (centre), receiving the signed covenant from Michael Jones (right), vice chairman of the MFoC and minister of Melksham Baptist Church (New Broughton Road).



MFoC Covenant Service 2003

In April 2004, as the culmination of a project lasting about 3 years, the



Pre-school's newly completed purpose-built premises.

Pre-school moved out of the Chapel's "Green Room" to purpose-built premises on the site of St. Michael's Primary School in Queensway (now The Manor Primary School, Queensway Site).



Queensway Hall (before renovations)

On 17th September 2004 we purchased Queensway Hall an ex-Church hall of 3,150 square feet on a 0.45 acre site situated directly opposite the Chapel buildings, about 35 yards away, on the corner of Queensway and Pembroke Road. This acquisition provided additional space necessary in order that the Chapel's activities in the community may grow.

We give thanks to God for providing all the necessary finances! The purchase price was £215,000 plus £5,000 for associated costs (i.e., surveyors, solicitors, Stamp Duty, etc). At the time of acquisition gifts from the fellowship amounted to £110,600 plus an interest free loan of £40,000. Gifts from charitable trusts and other organisations amounted to £70,600.

After much hard work by volunteers under the supervision of Ken Pavey, the main hall and stage were redecorated by mid-December 2004 which was just in time for the Hall to be used for some Christmas events. The remaining side rooms needed further renovation and redecorating before the building could be used for regular activities. This work was complete by September 2005 when the Family Centre and Junior Church began to use the Hall for their regular weekly activities. With the use of volunteer labour, the total costs of renovation and redecorating were kept to under £7,000.

Although a little more work was still required on the outside, to formally recognise God's provision of the Hall we held, on 28th January 2006, an Open Day so that anyone interested could drop in and inspect the premises between 10:00am and 4:00pm. This was followed by a Thanksgiving Service in the evening. By this time, God had provided sufficient money to meet all the renovation costs and to reduce the interest free loan to £30,000. The rest of the interest free loan was repaid in instalments and was cleared in May 2007.

In November 2010 Queensway Chapel became a charitable company, limited by guarantee. The charity number is 1138752 and the company number is 7378596. It's official name is 'Queensway Chapel (Melksham)' but 'Queensway Chapel' is retained as a working name. The founding trustees are: Stuart Arnold, Tim Cracknell, Jack Woodward, Ken Pavey and Gerald Skinner.