

## CROWTHORNE BAPTIST CHURCH



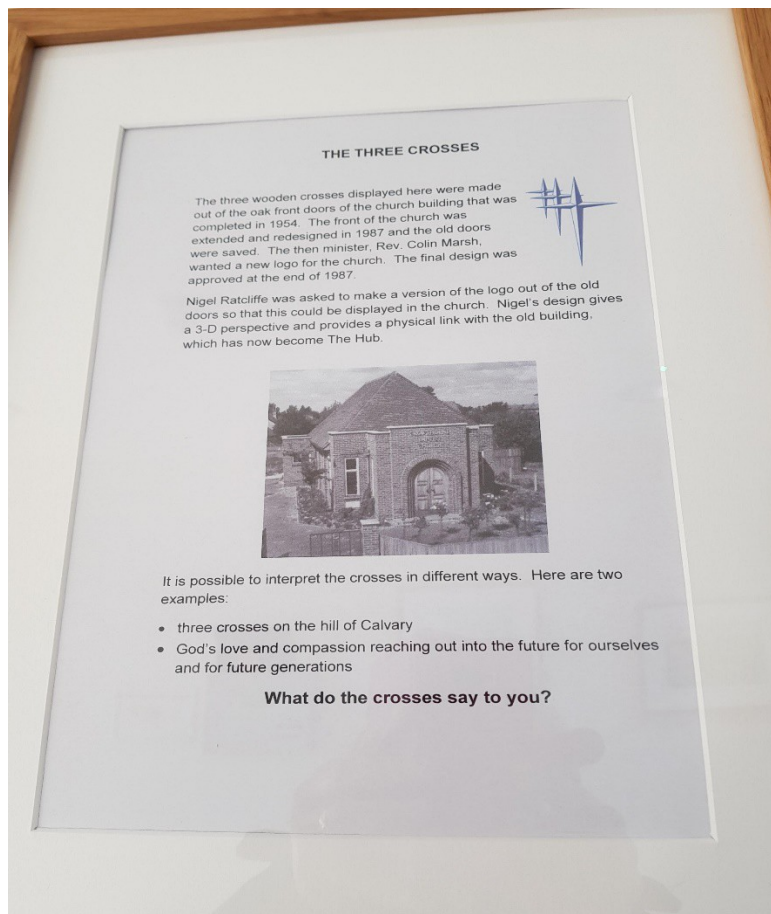
The earliest known Baptist place of worship in the area appears to be a small day school established in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in a building known as the “Boarded House” in St Sebastian’s. A young man employed by Heelas, the linen drapers in Wokingham, used to hold occasional services there. The Crowthorne Baptist Church was an offshoot from the Camberley Church from which it sprang in 1914. The Wheatley family were prime movers in this venture. An early meeting was held in Mr Wheatley’s workshop and a meeting place was much discussed. Mr Sworder’s garage was too expensive at 7 shillings per week so it was decided to wait until the Oddfellows’ Hall was built. The first service was held in the Oddfellows’ Hall on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> September 1914. Mr Farrow of Camberley preached the first sermon. The Wesleyan Minister visited and managed to persuade several of the early enthusiasts to join his Methodist Church. War had broken out in August 1914 and the Oddfellows’ Hall was requisitioned for billeting recruits. No other accommodation could be found so services were suspended until the Hall was again available and an opening service was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1915. A Sunday School was started in February 1916 and in July 1917 it was decided to talk to Mr Richard Over of Camberley, who had a grain store in Crowthorne about a plot of land in the High Street. At £375, it was thought that Mr Over’s plot was too expensive and that other owners of land should be approached. Unfortunately there were no other plots available for sale. After further discussion Mr Over agreed to a figure of £180 for the land. After some months negotiation the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1918 heard that their offer of £100 for a disused chapel in Calcot had been accepted. There being a shortage of labour, Mr Wheatley himself offered to take down the building with whatever help he could find. Plans were now put in place to raise the money and 11 Trustees were elected. By 13<sup>th</sup> August it was found that to comply with the bye-laws they needed

another 10ft of land making the plot 51ft x 150ft and thus costing £225. The trustees were able to borrow this money from the bank. The re-building of the chapel had cost £16 and, as a baptistry would cost another £12 and be very difficult due to the shortage of materials this addition was deferred until more funds were available. The new church was dedicated on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 1918.

It was not until March 1922 that the members felt that they could appoint a resident Pastor. As funds were restricted they looked at employing a student pastor. Eventually Mr Walter Davis of Warminster in Wiltshire was appointed and commenced his ministry on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> January 1924. The long anticipated baptistry was not built until July 1939. The first baptismal service was held on 27<sup>th</sup> August.

In July 1950 a proposal to build a new Church was revived. A tender for £4,435 was approved on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1953 and the new church was opened on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1954. The old church was sold to the Royal British Legion in Yateley for £125. By 1963 the church agreed to build a church hall which was located behind the existing church and opened in April 1964.

Both the Baptist Church and the adjacent hall were demolished in 2019 and work commenced on a new building. The “Heart” used for church services and additional activities now occupies the back of the new premises and the “Hub” used daily for the creche and for other meetings and activities sits at the front with the Minister’s office and welcome hall forming the façade facing the High Street. This fine new building was opened in 2021.



A link which was first created in 1967 when the doors of the 1954 church were used to carve three crosses, the symbol of Crowthorne Baptist Church has been incorporated into the entrance hall of the current church as above.



Again thanks to Martin Prescott for most of the above information.