

A Brief Church History

In June 1904, Ipswich Bethesda Church hired the Parish room in the village of Whitton for the villagers to worship in. After 6 months attendance had grown, when they were suddenly forced to quit the room.

For the following 6 years meetings were held in a corn granary owned by a local farmer, Mr W. Lait. The work grew and soon included a Saturday afternoon children's class, but a granary was not a good place for worship.

Gifts totalling £150 and items of furniture were donated by friends from Bethesda Church towards a new church. Soon a building constructed of corrugated iron sheets on the outside and a polished pine panelled interior, complete with "modern" gas lighting and heating, seating about 200 people was erected costing about £200. This building, which was located somewhere near the present Sports Centre, was packed with people for its opening in June 1910 but did not flourish, and as the First World War came, and many of the young male leaders went to fight, Bethesda sold the building.

By 1937 Whitton was no longer a village, it had become a large housing estate of about 5000 people which looked likely to double, and had no free church, so again Bethesda decided to build one. One generous person bought the present site for £200, and another paid for a wall to built around it. Within the first year £800 of the expected cost of £2,500 had been raised. The new Shakespeare Road day school was used to hold a Sunday School for as many as 400 children whilst the building was in progress. But the Second World War came and the building had still not commenced, and in 1947 with £2,000 in the building fund, permission to erect a prefabricated building was refused.

It was not until 1951 that permission for a brick building seating 350, with class rooms and kitchen was granted, and building commenced. The opening ceremony was held on 27th September 1952. The final cost of more than £10,000 was met only partly by £6,000 in the fund and an interest free loan of £2,000. The balance was finally cleared in 1956.

At the start, weeknight meetings were built up, but Sunday meetings were very poorly attended. In 1954 Mr W. Taylor, recently retired from the Caravan Mission to Village Children, assumed responsibility for Whitton. He was succeeded in 1959 by Mr R. Eddy who despite much hard work found that only the work with the children and the women's weekday meetings were very well attended. In 1960 the baptistery, costing £270, which had been too expensive to include in the original work, was generously donated.

In 1968 Mr N. Rule became the Pastor, unpaid and part time. In 1970 Bethesda Church handed over responsibility for Whitton Baptist Church to its newly constituted membership of 28. In January 1980 the church called its first full time paid Pastor, Mr B. Ward, who had previously worked for the London City Mission. In February 1997 the church employed Mr A. Crane, recently

returned from missionary work in Africa, as a part time Assistant to Pastor Ward, for Pastoral and visitation work. In February 1998 he was made part time Assistant Pastor, and was with the church until moving to Sunderland in 2001.

Since becoming an independent church, the membership has grown steadily from all ages and walks of life, and the building has been modified with a new toilet extension to replace the old dilapidating outside toilet block. We give God all the praise for His goodness to our church, and our thanks to Bethesda Church and all those individuals who have given so generously in time and money to further the work in our church.

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