

## Baptist Chapel, Bourton, Shrivenham

A general history 1851 - 1900

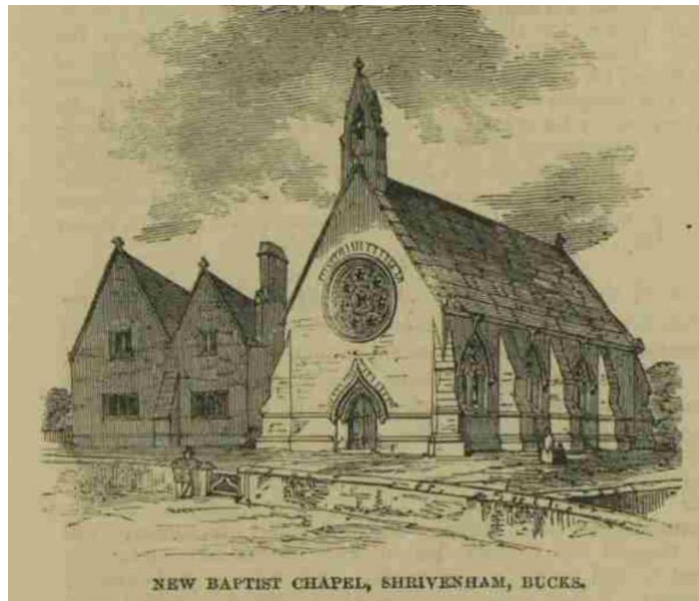


Previously to the Baptist Chapel being built in Bourton in 1851, there was no place of worship at all. A non-conformist church only, was likely to have been an unpopular situation with many of the landed gentry nearby and may well have prompted the building of the Episcopal Parish Church of St James in 1859.

The Tuckers owned and occupied Bourton House. They were a successful family of merchants employed in the Silk Trade. In an Indenture dated 1847, Henry and Joseph Tucker were described as '*Silk Warehousemen*' and '*Silk Punters*.' The Census of 1861 listed Henry as a '*Magistrate and Silk Merchant*.' They were certainly wealthy, and it is believed that Bourton House was built new in 1845, but little documentary evidence has survived. There is evidence that they were buying up land and property in and around the village of Bourton in the 1830's. (See SHS Cat No: N1125 for more details).

Henry Tucker was known in religious terms as a non-conformist; he did not worship at any episcopal church, preferring instead the teachings of the Baptists. And such was his devotion that he donated the land and paid for the erection of a new chapel. A newspaper article called it a '*new Congregational Baptist chapel*.' (Reading Mercury 18<sup>th</sup> October 1851).

The Illustrated London News (1<sup>st</sup> November 1851) covered the opening of the chapel with a drawing and described it as a little chapel (to which a clergyman's house is attached). This house later became known, and still is today as The Manse. The chapel was officially opened by the Hon & Rev. B.W. Noel, M.A. The Architect was Mr Frederick W. Ordish of John Street, Adelphi, London.



A small newspaper print showed that two years later the Baptist Chapel at Bourton was officially certified and licenced for solemnising marriages according to the law (The Patriot 26<sup>th</sup> May 1853).

The Census of 1861 showed that John P. Larkins was the Baptist Minister, and with him were his family of Cecilia, his wife, daughters Isabell and Cecilia and a son called Marcus. With the family was also one servant and a Governess for the children. In 1867 Robert Mansfield had taken over as the Minister and he officiated at the marriage of James Little of Lydiard Tregoze and local girl Ann Preddy on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1872. (Faringdon Adver 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 1871).

The Census of 1881 showed that something had happened concerning the upkeep of the church building, for although the Minister was still Robert Mansfield, a man called George Cox was described as a '*Lease taker of Baptist Chapel.*' It could be that part of it, the downstairs basement perhaps, was let out to George Cox to run a small business and provide income

for the chapel. Rev Mansfield's house next door was called Bourton Cottage and he had a large family with him of Emma his wife with five daughters and two sons.

A large 'Society' wedding took place on 30<sup>th</sup> April 1885. It was the marriage of George Henry Dean, Esq, of Sittingbourne in Kent, and Jane, the daughter of the late Henry Mead, Esq; formerly of Bourton. She was also the niece of Henry Tucker's wife of Bourton House. The local people put on an excellent display for the occasion. At the entrance of the village a large banner with big white letters read, '*Every Blessing attend you,*' with many other similar banners adorning the route to the Baptist chapel. The Rev. Horatio Gillmore, brother-in-law of the bride officiated. The local school children sang songs. The article that was printed in the local newspaper covered the wedding in fine detail, naming all the guests and most of the gifts that were showered upon the fortunate couple. (Swindon Adver 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1885). The article concluded with the happy couple taking their departure for the Isle of Wight.

There were two weddings that took place at the Baptist Chapel in 1890. In June, local girl Alice Ritchens, the daughter of Thomas Ritchens who was the proprietor of Grove Farm in the middle of Bourton. She married W. John Wilkins of Carmarthen and although the article printed in the local newspaper was small, it gave a detailed description. (Faringdon Adver 28<sup>th</sup> June 1890). However, the wedding that took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> October of that year was scant in detail, which was surprising when considering just who it was. It was Robert Mansfield's third daughter Selina who married Charles H. Long of Bath. Her father officiated and was assisted by the Rev. James Baillie. It's puzzling as to why it only warranted an announcement of just a few lines under the heading of '*Marriages.*' (Bath Chron 9<sup>th</sup> October 1890).

Robert and Emma Mansfield were still at The Manse in the Census of 1891. The following year Robert celebrated his anniversary of 25 years of being the Pastor of Bourton Baptist Chapel. The local newspaper reported that it was a happy occasion and about 150 people sat down to tea. (Swindon Adver 11<sup>th</sup> June 1892). During the many speeches made, Robert Mansfield was told that he had, '*stuck to the true old gospel, and everyone hoped they could keep him for many more years.*' It was a memorable day for everyone present.



Robert Mansfield resigned as Chairman of Bourton Parish Council in January 1900 on account that he was leaving the neighbourhood. Perhaps this was part of the reason why the Bourton Baptist Chapel seems to have gone into decline, but it also seems to have been following a national trend of non-conformist churches losing popularity. The Bourton House Estate being put up for sale in 1894 may well have been another factor. The influence of the Tuckers fading on the death of Henry Tucker in 1875. The Census' of 1901 and 1911 do not show any Baptist Ministers and the Ministers house, that had become known as The Manse, was occupied in 1911 by the household of James Havard Thomas who was a Sculpturer/Artist of moderate renown. (See below).

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.												
Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the language of the Column. The entries should be written as follows.												
The contents of this Schedule will be treated as confidential. Entries may still be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, or in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.												
NAME AND STATUS	RELATIONSHIP TO HEAD OF FAMILY	SEX AND AGE	PARTICULARS AS TO MARRIAGE	PROFESSION OR OCCUPATION of Person aged ten years and upwards	ETHNICITY	NATURALIZATION	RELIGION	EDUCATION	REMARKS	REMARKS	REMARKS	REMARKS
1 James Thomas Head	36	36	Married	6	6	0	Sculptor (Artist)	481	481	481	481	481
2 Sofia Thomas Wife	38	38	Married	19	6	0	Student (School)	380	461	461	461	461
3 Maria Thomas Daughter	17	17	Single	15	15	0	Student (School)	390	390	390	390	390
4 John Thomas Son	8	8	Single	8	8	0	Student (School)	390	390	390	390	390
5 Elizabeth Thomas Daughter	6	6	Single	6	6	0	Student (School)	390	390	390	390	390
6 Frederick Thomas Son	4	4	Single	4	4	0	Student (School)	390	390	390	390	390
7 Maria Thomas Daughter	2	2	Single	2	2	0	Student (School)	390	390	390	390	390
8 Rosanna Cecilia Daughter	33	33	Single	33	33	0	Student (School)	487	487	487	487	487
9 Elsie Mabel Daughter	16	16	Single	16	16	0	Student (School)	487	487	487	487	487

However, there is one further link to the past from a newspaper article of 1930 which covered the death of Selina Long (nee Mansfield). After her marriage at Bourton in 1890 she settled with her husband Charles Long in Bath. She was a Justice of the Peace, and Mayoress of Bath in 1917 and carried out much good work with her special interest in infant welfare. She was appointed a Magistrate in 1921 and was one of the first women to join the Bench. Her obituary in the newspaper was a glowing report of all she achieved and how she would be much missed by the people of Bath. (Bath Chron 5<sup>th</sup> April 1930).

Further research will be necessary to establish when the Baptist Chapel became the Bourton Village Hall. (*The rear of the Chapel below*).



To the rear of the chapel is a burial ground (photo below). The interments there range from 1856 until 1901. At the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the ground had become very overgrown but was cleared and is now kept maintained. Shrivenham Heritage Society have carried out a survey of the visible burials there, the results of which are stored in their Digital Vault. This can be accessed free of charge by emailing; [info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk](mailto:info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk)

