



Local History Collection

15 - The History of Fifield Chapel

Summer 2022

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During the 1790's the Berkshire Association of Independent Ministers and Churches was formed and in 1851 the Ecclesiastical census showed that half of all worshippers chose to attend a non-conformist place of worship.

In 1867 Thomas Reynolds, the owner of Grove Farm in Coningsby Lane founded The Fifield Village Mission in one of his barns. This Chapel was one of a number of small rural independent evangelical chapels in the area. Other locations were in Ascot and White Waltham. Records of the Fifield Village Mission were given to the Berkshire records office by a former officer when the Mission folded.



Thomas Reynolds eventually built a wooden chapel which was situated in his garden where it remained until 1897. This wooden chapel was large enough to seat 120. However a later owner of Grove Farm decided he wanted more privacy and the Chapel was relocated to its present site on the Fifield Road just opposite Coningsby Road. This move must have been quite spectacular to watch as it was moved on wooden rollers and most of the village turned out to watch in 1897. The cost of the removal was paid for by Nathaniel Micklem of Fifield House.

Nathaniel Micklem was born in Cookham, gained a 1st in British Civil Law at Oxford in 1880. He was called to the bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1881 and took silk in the early 1900's becoming Queen's Counsel. In 1906 Micklem was elected Liberal Member of Parliament for Watford (the 1st time a

non-conservative held the seat) and had moved from the area. However his family were an old nonconformist family and he was a lifelong Congregationalist.



Services were held in the Chapel on Sundays and in rotation with other local non-conformist chapels and churches, including the one at Touchen End. There was a Sunday school for the younger members of the congregation and a Sunday afternoon adult service. Services held at the chapel also included baptisms and weddings. The entrance to the chapel was on the bend in the road, with no pavement! The entrance door to the chapel led to a kitchen/entrance hall with a small back room for coats and hats and then a door into the main chapel area; all wooden walls and an open wooden ceiling rising to a high apex. The wooden seating faced a raised dais for the altar and organ but there was not a pulpit.



One local resident can recall the large land drain that ran from the front of Willow Creek, under the road and to the back of the chapel. This land drain was a real adventure during dry spells when the local youngsters would crouch down to use it as a play tunnel to access the back of the chapel, remembering to be especially quiet if there was a service in progress and they could hear the singing!

