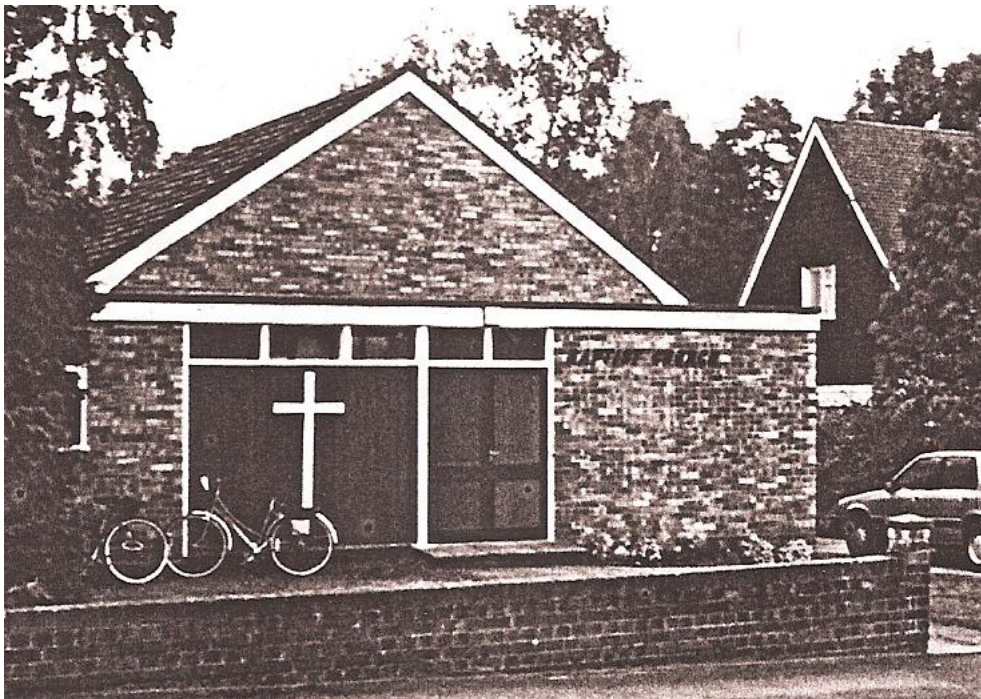


## History of Church Crookham Baptist Church

In 1937 Fleet Baptist Church decided to open a mission to the large Army camp based in Crookham. It was given the use of a hall that was owned by the Army, Navy and Air force Board on a 21year lease. Thus a Baptist work in Crookham was begun with the opening of the Crookham Crossroads Gospel Mission on January 31st. Before long there was a flourishing Sunday school and a Women's Fellowship was established, Sunday evening services, with refreshments afterwards were held for the soldiers.

Unexpectedly around 1954 an opportunity arose to re-locate the work to Basingbourne Road in Church Crookham. This was made possible by the generous donation of a plot of land by Mrs Hugh Pool and also by a lady called Mrs Holt who donated her life savings of £400 to the building fund. The land given was at that time in a heavily wooded area and the question was asked at a Fleet church meeting "Why build in no man's land?" "Why not build where the people are?" However this plot was on the edge of what was soon to become a major housing development containing both private, local authority and Ministry of Supply homes for workers at the nearby National Gas Turbine Establishment who were being re-located from the Leicester area.

The new church building was opened in October 1957 and renamed the 'Baptist Mission Church' on its present site in Basingbourne Road. The architect for this new building was a Mr Hurst a member at Crookham and the builder a Mr R.Brooks of Fleet. The estimated cost was £2,200 plus electrical work, somewhat different from today's prices! There is a stone from this building incorporated into a wall of the entrance foyer in the current building. The church was registered for worship and marriage in August 1960 and renamed "Crookham Baptist Church" but remaining a daughter church of Fleet Baptist Church and under their Pastor the Rev.R.H Spooner.



During the late 1950's and 1960's, the new houses in the area were mainly occupied by young families moving into the area and the work of the Sunday School expanded rapidly under the leadership of its Superintendent Mr Fred O'Donnell ("Uncle Fred"), with as many as 130 children meeting at different times during Sundays. Boy and Girl Covenanters groups were held on Sunday mornings and the younger children in the afternoons. There were so many younger children they had to be divided into two groups, as the church was not big enough to accommodate them all. The under sevens met first at 2.00pm and the 8 to 11 year olds at 3.00pm. The adult membership numbered about 30 during this time and Sunday evening services were held for them at 6.30pm. This pattern on Sundays was followed all through the 1960's.

The picture below shows Fred, on the left, with the Junior Sunday School in May 1965.



There were several highlights to the Sunday school year apart from the normal Christian festivals of Christmas, Easter and Whitsun.

Firstly there was the Sunday school anniversary in early May. This was an all day event with a morning service, afternoon Sunday schools and an evening service. There was usually a visiting speaker, often from Scripture Union, prize giving and singing well-rehearsed pieces by the children for the parents to enjoy. Fred, who worked up in London all week would travel up again early Saturday morning to purchase a tray full of rose blooms from Covent garden so that all the Mum's who attended on Sunday could be given a small button hole on arrival at the church.

Next in the summer came the Sunday school outing where 2 or 3 coach loads of children and parents would go off to the seaside or some other venue suitable for children to enjoy themselves. Again Fred's planning meant that the children were all given several free or cheap tickets to fairground rides etc.

September was 'Promotion Sunday' when children moved up a class to the next age group.

Finally there was the Christmas party, a fairly riotous affair with Fred in charge of the games!

Vast quantities of food was prepared by the parents and teachers and consumed at alarming speed by the children.

In addition to the Sunday school a Mum's and Toddlers group was started in 1965 on a Friday afternoon. This was to enable the Mums to take turns in helping look after the toddlers while the others could go off and do their weekend shopping.

During the 1960's the Women's Friendship Hour also grew with Mrs Shaddick, wife of the Rev H.C. Shaddick, taking over the leadership in 1961 when her husband became the Pastor of the Fleet and Crookham churches. They had a full programme of speakers each week and annual events like the anniversary tea where as many as 70 ladies from various churches in the area would gather. Joint coach outings with the Fleet ladies were arranged in the summer and were always one of the highlights of the year.

The 1960's had been a time of considerable social change in this country but it was to be the 1970's that proved to be the decade of change for Crookham Baptist Church

The sudden death of Fred O'Donnel in 1972 at the early age of 53 came as a severe shock to the fellowship. Made even more tragic because he died the day of the Sunday school anniversary, the day in the year he loved more than any other. It was to prove difficult to find a replacement for a man who had devoted his whole life to the children of the Sunday School, doing his best to not only teach them about Jesus but also to show the love of Jesus by quietly leaving boxes of groceries outside the doors of the poorest families. However in the summer of that year Don Patterson a local schoolteacher agreed to take on the responsibility. Don was to serve for 2 years before accepting a deputy head masters job in Hertfordshire.

It was also during the early-seventies that the charismatic movement was beginning to grow and in 1973 several members were drawn away from the fellowship to join the emerging house church movement in Fleet and Crookham, including some of the Covenanter leaders and older Covenanters. In the same year the Rev H.Shaddick retired and the Rev F.D.Cobley took over as Pastor of Fleet and Crookham.

The size of the Sunday school had remained fairly static during the 1960's but as the families started to grow up and the nature of Sundays in Britain changed from being a day of 'rest' to one of 'recreation', numbers started to decline, so when it was announced that Don Patterson would be leaving in 1974 it was decided to hold an review of the way the Sunday school, Covenanters and church services were organised. Colin Salter was appointed leader of the Sunday school but it was agreed that the Covenanters would close and the older children would join with the Fleet young people in the mornings. It was also decided to change the evening service to a morning one, the Sunday school met between 10.00am and 11.00am with the morning service starting at 11.15am. These changes only met with partial success, in particular very few of the Crookham teenagers made the transition to Fleet and so in 1977 a Wednesday evening club was started for this age group and ran for 2 years before it was closed through lack of support.

During late 1978 and early 1979, with declining numbers, serious consideration was given to closing the Church and moving all its meetings to the Fleet Church who were also seeing a decline in numbers. However in the summer of 1979 two families moved into the area and joined the church and boosted the congregation by 10! , There were to be no further discussions about closing the church. Praise the Lord for his overruling.

In 1980 the few members who worshipped regularly at Basingbourne Road set themselves the task of praying for the development of the work with the following priorities, Youth work, our own evening service, additional members and our own midweek prayer and bible study groups - at that time we were one of several Fleet groups.



During the period 1980 to 1988 God encouraged and blessed the fellowship. There was a slow but steady development of the work with small but regular numbers attending both Sunday and mid-week meetings. In 1982 the church introduced Sunday evening services as well as the morning and Marian Mason started a group for older girls meeting on a Friday evenings but the problem of retaining the children once they had started secondary school remained and so in 1985 a new venture for this age group was started by Andy Trundle called 'Quest Club'. This proved very successful but to meet at the same time as the rest of the Sunday school they needed a separate room and so an old caravan was purchased for them later that year. However it was not long before the group outgrew this accommodation and the church realised that the caravan could only be a temporary solution. Once a month Family services were introduced in the mid eighties and proved to be very popular and well attended by parents of the children who were not from church families.

In December 1985 the Hart District Council put a notice in the local press announcing that their offices at Hartley Wintney and Fleet were to be closed and re-located to a new purpose built office block in Fleet. They offered the "portable" buildings that were located on both sites, to any organisations in HDC involved in Youth work. The buildings were to become available in mid-1986. There was to be no charge for these buildings but the organisations had to arrange for the stripping, dismantling, and transportation of the buildings within the time frame that would be set by the developers. Both Crookham and Fleet Baptist churches made a bid for one building each and were successful in both cases.

Crookham had bid for a Portakabin because it would be easy to move and provide a ready-made solution to our accommodation problem with the Quest Club. However we were allocated a timber building from the Hartley Wintney site that was built in sections so that it could be taken apart and re-assembled on another site, apparently ideal for our purposes but involving a huge amount of work for a small fellowship, it also only had a life expectancy of 10/15 years. The Church however decided to take on this task but with only a few "labourers in the field" the job of stripping the building of everything useful in the short time frame given by the developers proved to be an impossible task but thanks to a sympathetic Managing Director of the company a time extension was granted. This was indeed fortunate - or God given - as the firm contracted to dismantle and transport the buildings to Basingbourne Road pulled out just 3 days before they were due to do the job! However a new company was quickly found and the sections arrived on site in the summer of 1986.

The Picture below shows the Hall Sections stacked behind the church.



It became even more difficult to obtain planning permission to re-erect the building because of changes to the building regulations, a bit ironical, as it previously had been the Hart District Council planning office! Eventually we obtained planning permission but it was not until the summer of 1988 that building work could commence. It had been decided that we would employ contractors to do all the foundation and drainage work and erect the “shell” of the building but the members undertook to do all the internal work necessary to comply with the new regulations. Many hours were spent working on this project by the small team available and it was not until March 1989 that the ‘new’ hall was finally opened.



The previous September a Mature Student Pastor from Spurgeon’s college, Brian Harley joined the Fleet Church and was given the special responsibility of building up the work at Crookham. A period of thrilling growth followed, both numerically and in breadth of ministry. The new hall was put to good use with the church opening a Playgroup on 3 mornings a week and a Mum’s and Toddlers group on the other two mornings. The Sunday school had by now a majority of children from church families and we also had the facilities to run both Sunday morning services and the Sunday school at the same time. This change was introduced in 1989 and meant that Colin Salter had to give up being the Sunday school leader as he was also the main organist. Marian Mason took over the Sunday school from Colin with Andy Trundle continuing to run the Quest club for the older children.

In about 1991, it was decided to bring all the young peoples work under the umbrella of the Covenanters Organisation. The ‘covies’ groups quickly outgrew the Hall and caravan and so a much larger Portakabin was purchased to accommodate them all and sited at the far end of the plot. The Portakabin was used by covenanters Sunday mornings, and the Youth group on Friday evenings.

The picture on the next page shows the Portakabin, which was used from about 1991 until the redevelopment of the buildings in 2007.





Although this eased the problem of the Covenanter groups the church was full to overflowing most Sunday mornings and it was becoming a limiting factor for further growth. It was therefore decided to commission a Feasibility Study in 1991 to explore ways of extending the premises. Several problems arose mainly because of the size and shape of the site and it was decided to put the project on hold and consider other options.

In June 1992 after much prayer and with the full backing of the Fleet Church, the church became a Baptist Church in its own right and was renamed Church Crookham Baptist Church.

The church decided that, since its Student pastor had now completed his training at Spurgeon's College and had moved away, a priority should be given to finding its own full time Pastor and also a suitable property to become the Church Manse. The search began for both and in January 1993 our first full time Pastor Rev Philip Wright was appointed and he and his family moved into the Manse we had purchased just a few weeks before.

The church continued to grow during the period of its first full time Pastor (January 1993 to March 1996) and so the extension project was revived and a building fund set up. Plans for extending the church were drawn up by Allen Associates and submitted for planning approval in July 1996. These were rejected by HDC in the Oct of that year.

After Phil left and until April 1998 the work was led by three Elders and God graciously continued to bless the fellowship in that time. The 10-year loan we had taken out to purchase the Manse was paid off in 4 years leaving us free to concentrate our giving on mission and the building fund. The building fund was to receive an unexpected boost of £30,000 in 1999 with the generous donation from the Trust fund set up to administer the proceeds from the sale of the Heatherlands Evangelical Church building and land after its closure in 1997.

In April 1998 the church appointed its second full time pastor the Rev Gordon McIndoe who came to us from Scotland with his wife Jenny. Their two grown up daughters staying in Scotland.

During the period 1996 to 2000 the membership remained fairly constant with around 130 adults and children attending Sunday morning worship and Covenanters. Our buildings were therefore still giving us accommodation problems and so a second set of plans were drawn up and submitted to HDC in April 1997, these were also rejected because of concerns over car parking and the impact on the local neighbourhood.

The Church spent much time seeking the Lords guidance on the way forward, was the Lord saying "No" or "Not Yet"? Many different ideas were considered e.g. should we be looking for another site, should we consider hiring a hall for Sunday worship, etc. Eventually after holding a 3 day prayer and fast it was decided in 1998 to submit one more set of plans for approval. It was not until Feb 2000 that these plans were finally approved.

Unfortunately at around this time the membership had started to decline and there was a growing gap within the Leadership and some members of the church on their vision for the future development of the fellowship. This culminated in 2001 with around 20 members and their families moving away to form their own independent fellowship. Shortly after this break an opportunity arose for them to re-open an Independent Evangelical Church that had recently been closed in the nearby village of Crondall. They named this church The New Life Church.

With the congregation at CCBC now numbering around 50 the need for larger premises had largely disappeared, so it was decided not to proceed with the development of the premises at that time but to concentrate on rebuilding the fellowship both numerically and spiritually.

In the following summer of 2002, our Pastor receiving a call to a Church in his native Scotland where his family lived and he it felt to right to accept this call and enable the church to make a fresh start.

This gave the church the opportunity to review its vision of what type of church and service we believed God was calling us to in our local community and to look for a Pastor who could share in that work and vision, and so in August 2003 we were pleased to welcome Rev Robin Agnes to our fellowship.

After a period of consolidation new people started to be added to our numbers and in 2004 it was decided that the time was now right to think again about extending our premises. The hall in particular was beginning to reach the end of its useful life and a building committee was set up to review the plans we already had and make recommendations concerning any changes needed. Eventually a design brief was agreed and another firm of Architects appointed.

There again followed another series of difficulties over planning permission, affordability etc. but eventually, planning permission was granted and firm of builders was contracted to start work in the spring of 2005. This was not to be the end of our problems with developing our site however, as in the early part of 2006 our Builders were taken into receivership and although work on the new Hall was virtually completed, work stopped on the main church building. It was also proving much more difficult to secure the mortgage advance we needed to fund the work so an urgent review and much prayer was undertaken, seeking guidance on the way forward. It was decided to continue with the project trusting the Lord that the problems over finance and building work would be resolved. Work was restarted later that year with another company and fortunately the new company employed two of the key workers from the previous builders, so continuity was maintained. The project was inevitably delayed but May 2007 saw the opening of the new premises, almost 50 years exactly after the laying of the foundation stone of the original building. It was not until June 2007 that the mortgage was finally granted albeit for £30,000 less than we hoped for. However God moves in mysterious ways and by amazing 'coincidence' or 'God-incidence' we received a grant for exactly that amount from a Trust fund called the 'Ellis Trust,' which was principally set up to fund new projects in Methodist churches in this area.

The new Church Front in 2007







The pictures above show the new church from the front and hall from the rear. Our new premises are now being put to greater use, both for Church activities and also by the local community. Our current range of activities in addition to Sunday services, include Mum's and Toddler's, Jesus and Me (JAM) Club, Youth Club, Alpha courses, Women's Friendship, Back Classes and Coffee mornings. The University of the Third Age also hire our Hall Twice a month.

It is our prayerful desire that our new premises will be put to even greater use in furtherance of our mission to bring the love of the Lord Jesus and his Gospel to those in the fellowship, the local community and further afield on the various mission fields we support.

The first 50 years of the church at Basingbourne have seen times of great blessing as well as periods of difficulty. If there are lessons to be learnt one would say they can best be summed up in the scripture brought to us on more than one occasion "Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing among you" Joshua 3:5. This scripture is both a challenge and a promise as we move forward into the future.

Norman Baxter (with the help of many others)  
Nov 2007