



MBC
Minchinhampton
Baptist Church



1765 - 2015

Celebrating the past, anticipating the future

Our church has been on the go since 1765. Its first members met and served in Minchinhampton. Today we are a network church that is meeting and serving across a much wider area.



In the beginning...

Records show there have been non-conformists in Minchinhampton for over 300 years. There were just a few of them at first and they met in local houses. The first official Baptist meeting place was Giles Mason's house in Forwood. It was registered in 1699.

The number of local Baptists grew steadily after this; some of them were linked to the Baptist Church in Shortwood, Nailsworth. In the mid 1760s the minister of that church, Benjamin Francis, arranged for the Baptists in Minchinhampton to have a venue where they could all meet. And so our church began...

Our first meeting place

Our first place of worship was the purpose-built 'Minchinhampton Preaching Station' in Workhouse Lane. It opened in 1765. Today it is known as 'The Old Chapel' in Chapel Lane, home to two of our longstanding members, Peter and Liz Farley.



The Old Chapel as it is today



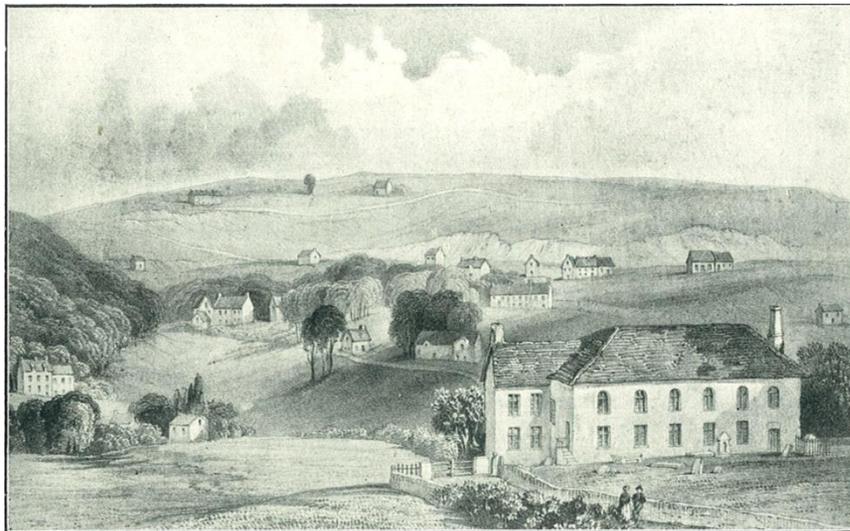
Peter and Liz outside their home

Our first preacher

Revd Francis led services at our Preaching Station every other Sunday evening. He did this for 35 years but with limited success, though the congregation at his own church in Shortwood grew in size and importance.



Reverend Benjamin Francis who campaigned for our first building



Original Baptist Meeting House, Shortwood

Beginning to bear fruit

Things picked up in 1818 when Revd Joseph Baynes became assistant pastor at Shortwood. Senior pastor Revd Winterbotham wrote:

“At Minchin Hampton after many years, in which nothing but the most painful discouragements were experienced, a very pleasing change has taken place: a spirit of hearing very generally prevails, a good congregation attends on the ministry of the word and a considerable no. have in a few years past evinced a decided attachment to the Redeemer’s interests. A good Sabbath school is established. And....a new church may soon be formed at this place, with the most pleasing prospect of success.”

Becoming independent

Revd Winterbotham was right! In 1824 his church in Shortwood blessed twelve of its members as they left to form a Baptist Church in Minchinhampton. It also promised to support them in becoming self-sufficient. Today we would call this a 'church plant'.

So our Preaching Station became a Baptist Meeting House. And our small adult congregation was able to join the twelve founders in membership.

We had officially become the Baptist Church in Minchinhampton.

A first time for everything

Our first minister was Revd Joseph Dunn. He was appointed in 1826 after ten months as a guest preacher, having previously served in Avening.

Four years later, in 1830, Revd Dunn baptised twelve people in the Old Chapel. These were the first baptisms to take place there. Before this they had taken place at Shortwood or Avening.

Revd Dunn was minister of our church for 14 years and arranged for us to have new premises – our first move.

On the move

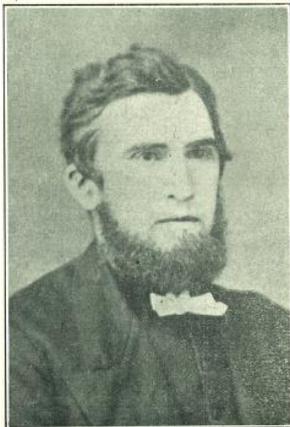
Our Tetbury Street premises were built in 1834, just around the corner from the Old Chapel. Lord of the Manor (at Gatcombe) David Ricardo gave us the ground and stone. And we raised the £1000 construction costs through donations. It seated 650 people.



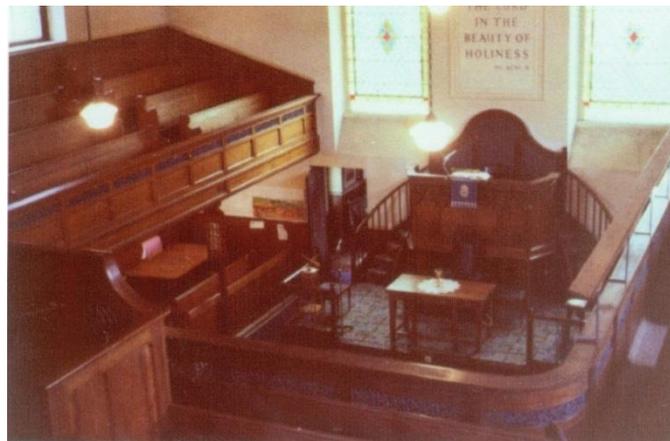
*Tetbury Street Chapel 70 years later, in 1904.
Today we use this building for adult worship.*

Staying fit for purpose

Thirty or so years later, between 1965 and 1878, Revd H A James gave our Tetbury Street building a makeover. As well as redecorating, he gave it comfier pews and added two meeting rooms (at the back), a new platform, oak pulpit and central heating . He also arranged the purchase of our first Manse (church house) in High Street, now 'The Kitchen' café.



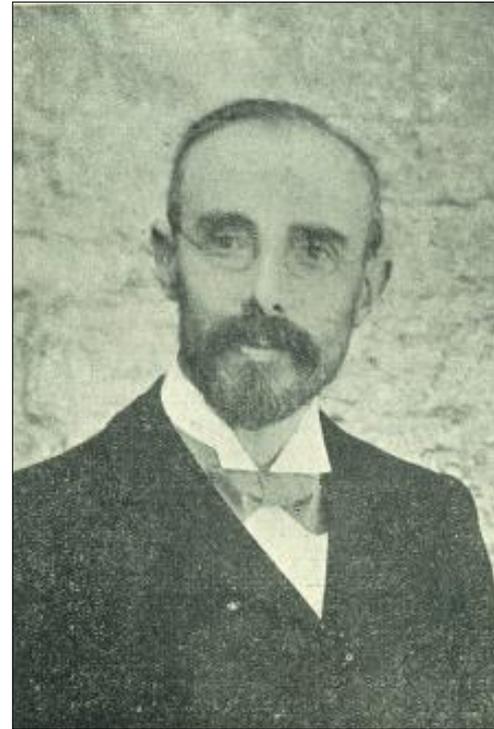
Revd H A James



Tetbury Street Chapel in 1977, still much the same but with electric lighting and newer pews. Beside the pulpit, you can see the door to one of the two meeting rooms [Gloucestershire Archives D11612]

Staying fit for purpose

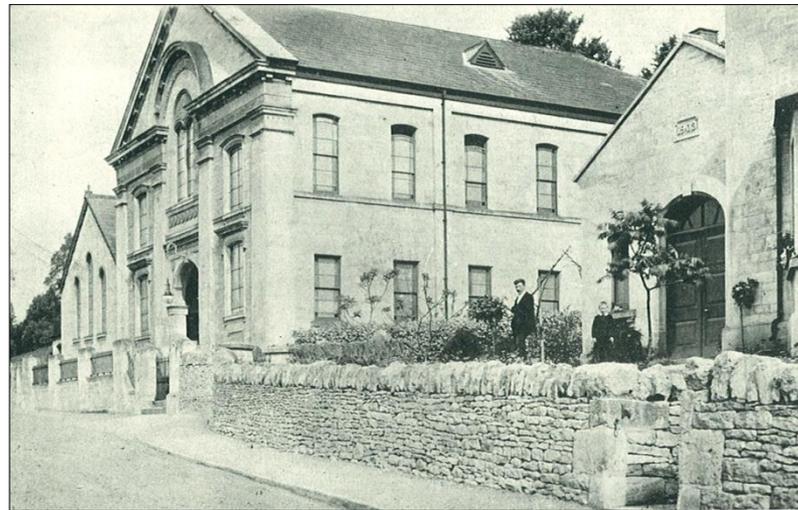
Shortly after, Revd H Kinder converted The Old Chapel into a Sunday School. The refurbished building had an assembly room upstairs, classrooms on the ground floor and a below-ground boiler house to provide hot-air heating.



Revd H Kinder (1878 – 1848)

Staying fit for purpose

Our parent church in Shortwood moved to a new building in Newmarket Street, Nailsworth around the same time. Much later, in 1967, it joined with Forest Green Congregationalists to form Christ Church, which is still worshipping at these premises.



Shortwood Chapel, Newmarket Street in the early 1900s

Local life for our early church

There were lots of changes in Minchinhampton during the early years of our church. Between its birth and the early 1900s members would have seen many of the 1600s cottages being knocked down and rebuilt. Also new houses being added, like the row of houses at the end of West End (for workers at Gatcombe Park), and the streets being paved. And they would have enjoyed the introduction of early public services, including a fire service, dispensary, street drainage and a water supply to their homes.

Local life for our early church

Unlike today, there were plenty of drinking places in the town during this period. In fact, by the time our Tetbury Street building had opened there were 20 public houses and 38 beershops, two of them on Tetbury Street itself: the White Hart on the corner with High Street; and the Salutation Inn. The town's men made good use of these and problems linked to drunkenness were common. In the early 1900s, led by Revd Samuel Ford, our church decided to do something about this and other issues affecting the community – build an Institute.

Designing the Institute

Revd “Sammy” Ford was quite a character and the main driving force behind the Institute.

Principled and warm-hearted, he had a heart for the ordinary people of the town. He was prepared to stand up for what he believed in, even when it meant facing the bailiffs and going to prison!



Reverend S J Ford (1897 – 1920)

The site for the Institute

On 9th June 1906 Revd Ford and a team of 53 volunteers began to demolish the caretaker's cottage that stood next to our Tetbury Street building, preparing the site for the new Institute.



*Bottom: The caretaker's cottage next to our Tetbury Street building [Image supplied by Di Wall]
Top right: "Sammy" Ford leads the way*



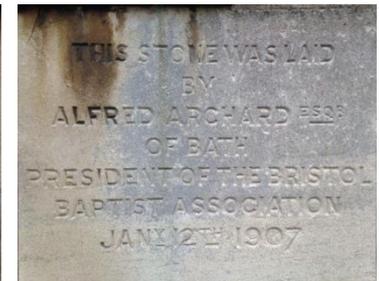
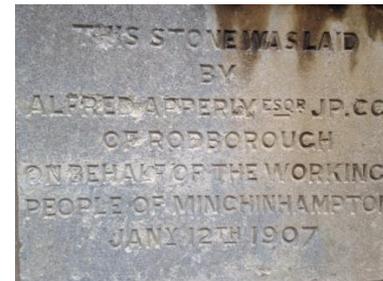
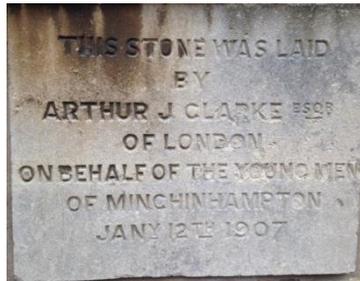
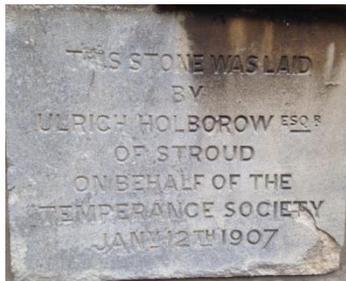
Men from our congregation, mostly mill hands and agricultural labourers, demolished the cottage and prepared the site [Image supplied by Di Wall]

Building the Institute

In 1907 our church held a special ceremony to lay five memorial stones in the front wall of the new Institute. You can still see them today.



Laying the Memorial Stones [Image supplied by Howard Beard]



Building the Institute

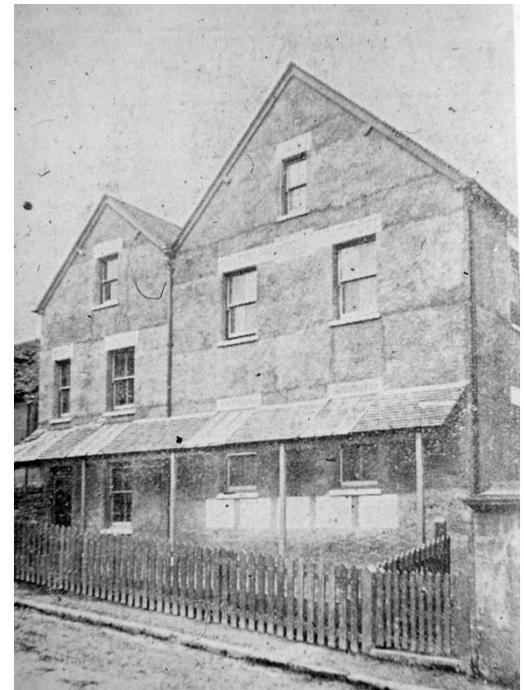
The Institute opened in July 1907. The entire project had lasted just 17 months and cost just over £1,125. Almost £300 had been given 'in kind' (gifts and free labour) and the rest raised through financial donations.



Using the Institute to bless and serve our community

The Institute was well used:

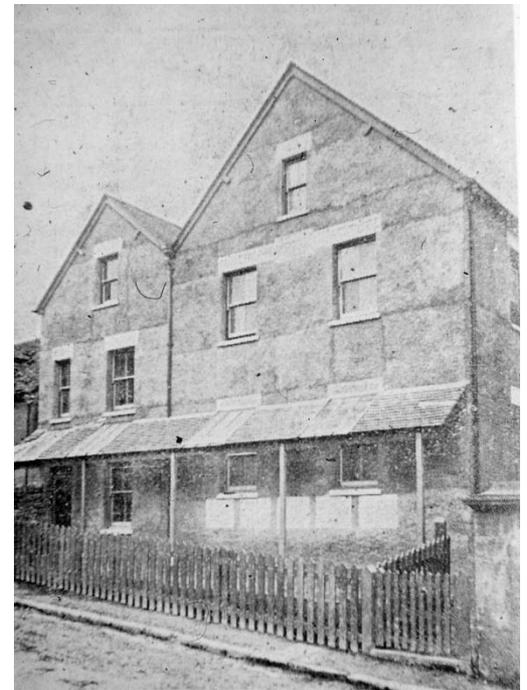
- Local men met there to play darts, draughts, billiards and table tennis without getting drunk; they could also read and enjoy a hot bath.
- Ladies from our church used it to wash soldiers' clothes during WW1. This laundry came from the Royal Australian Flying Corps, billeted at Aston Down airfield.



Using the Institute to bless and serve our community

The Institute was well used:

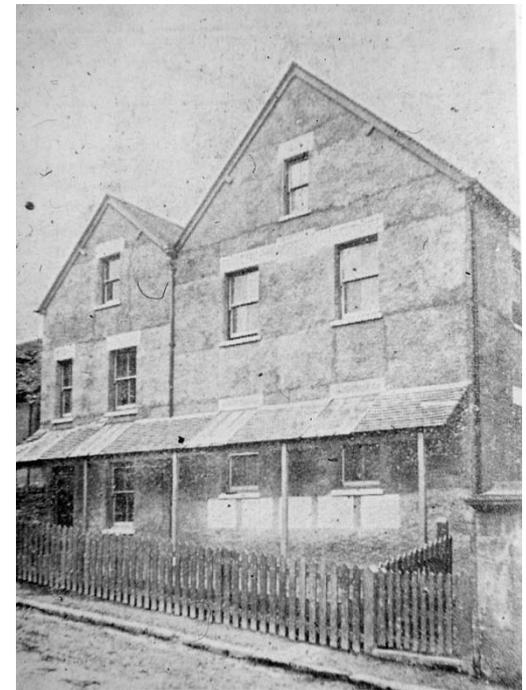
- During WW2, passing troops slept there and soldiers stationed at Aston Down used the public baths.
- In the 1960s, after it had outlived its original purpose, a junior and senior youth club met there.
- In the 1970s, the Council ran a library service from the ground floor. Its success led to the purpose-built library we still enjoy.



Using the Institute to bless and serve our community

The Institute was well used:

The adjoining caretaker's house also served as a boarding house. Our longest-standing member, Iris Dyer, lived there as a caretaker's daughter between 1935 and 1947. She has recorded her memories in a publication, 'Recollections of Minchinhampton Baptist Church plus a little history', which you can see at Gloucestershire Archives.



The Institute, with adjoining caretaker's house (on the left)

Something to celebrate

In 1924, during Revd G H Kilby's ministry (1920 – 27) our Church celebrated 100 years of being independent.

At this point we had been a worshipping congregation for the best part of 159 years.

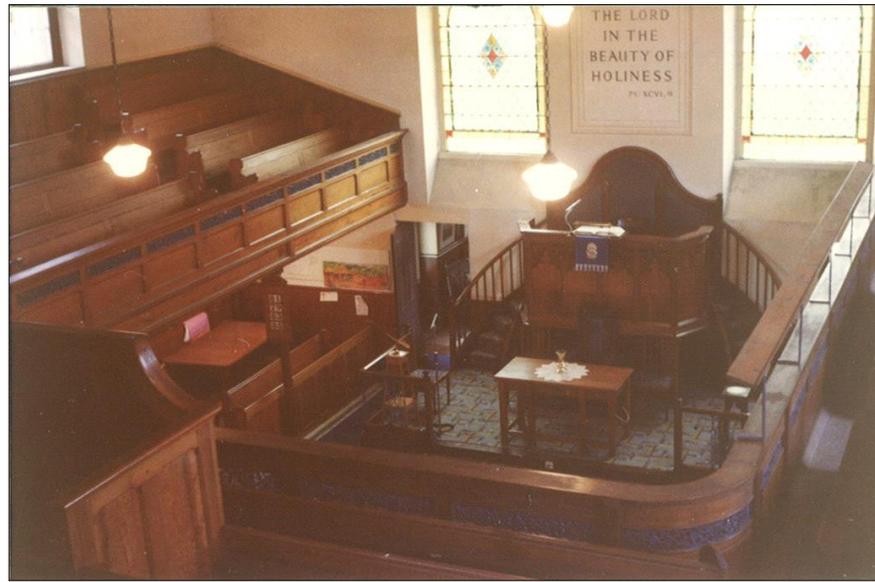


Time for another makeover

By the mid 1970s, around 100 years after its last makeover, our Tetbury Street building was ready for a full facelift.



*Entrance vestibule showing one of two staircases to the gallery
[Gloucestershire Archives D11612]*



View from the gallery. You can just see the organist's gallery seat on the left. The panel with the bible verse is still there today, hidden by the curtain and projector screen. [Gloucestershire Archives D11612]

Time for another makeover

In January 1997, during Revd Alan Edward's ministry (1967 - 86), we successfully applied for planning permission to divide our Tetbury Street building into two separate floors.



5163

THE BUILDING REGULATIONS 1972 (as amended)
(Public Health Acts 1936 and 1967)

To the STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL,
PLANNING DEPARTMENT,
COUNCIL OFFICES,
KINGSHILL, GLEBEY,
G. OS. GL-11 5EA

I/We hereby give notice of my/our intention to—

(a) erect a building;
(b) make structural alterations and/or extensions to a building;
(c) execute works and/or install fittings in connection with a building;
(d) make a material change of use of a building.

and deposit the attached drawings and other documents as required by regulation 4D and Schedule 2.
Drawings No. 24, 32, 33, 34

Signed *Alan Edward* Date 17th January 1997

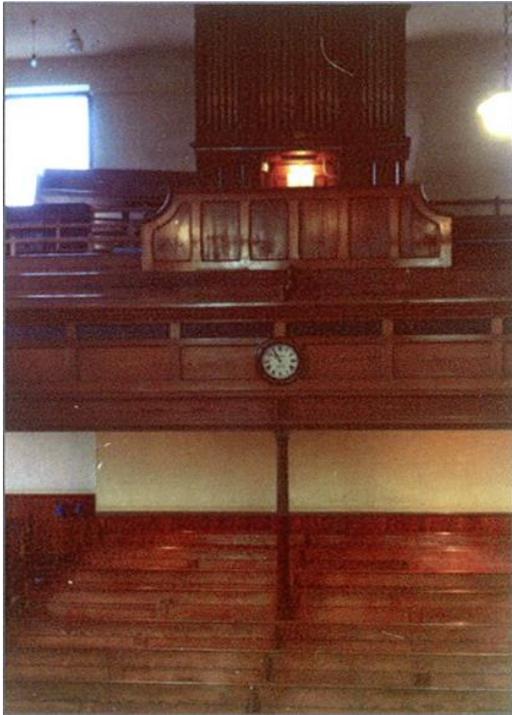
Name and address of person or persons on whose behalf the work is to be carried out (in block letters please)

St Nicholas' Church
Tetbury Street
St Nicholas
St Nicholas

Telephone No. 24921

Application for planning permission,
[Gloucestershire Archives DC58]

Time for another makeover



View from the front of the church. During the renovation work we installed a central doorway in the wall behind the pillar in this image. We still use this doorway today – you can see it in the image to the right.

Downstairs, we replaced the pews with chairs to create a more flexible worship area. We also lowered the pulpit and replaced the stained glass windows behind it with double glazing. And we installed a kitchen, cloakroom and toilets.



The downstairs worship area as it is today.

Time for another makeover

The gallery with its choir stalls and pipe organ was converted into an upstairs schoolroom. Today this area is home to Café Church.



View from the gallery choir stalls to the organ, which was relocated to the ground floor and eventually sold to All Saints Church, Norton in 1996.



The same space as it is today. The organ used to sit in front of the window that now has lights at either side.

Time for another makeover

The works were funded by two legacies and the sale of the Old Chapel.

The offering from the reopening ceremony was used to help establish a church in Romania.



A new use for The Old Chapel

The Old Chapel was sold to two of our current church leaders, Peter and Liz Farley, in 1977. They have lived there ever since.



New residents, Peter and Liz Farley, outside The Old Chapel with their children, Tim, Simon and Kate in 1978.



The Old Chapel as it is today. The circular mosaic floor plaque was just inside the main doors. It was relocated to the entrance hall of Tetbury Street Chapel in 1977.



The Institute reopens as the Church Centre

After 80 years and many social changes the Institute became redundant and began to deteriorate.

In September 1989 our church set out to convert it into a multipurpose meeting space that we could use and share with community groups.



The Institute reopens as the Church Centre

Led by Revd John Smith (1988 – 1993), we sold the adjoining caretaker's cottage and remodelled the inside of the Institute itself, giving it a kitchen, shower and toilet facilities and refurbished rooms named after key people in our church's history: Reverends Benjamin Francis, Joseph Baynes and Samuel Ford; and former caretakers of the Institute, Thomas Gardiner and George Ellins (Iris Dyer's father).



*Reverends Alan Edwards (speaking) and John Smith leading the Church Centre opening ceremony, 1992
[Image supplied by Iris Dyer]*

Recent changes to our Tetbury Street Buildings

The process of adapting and adding to our premises is continuous and reflects ever changing needs. During Revd Alisdair Longwill's ministry (1996 – 2007) we levelled the floor at the front of our Tetbury Street building, retiled the baptistry and upgraded the upstairs room to house a new mission: café church.



The Main Hall in Tetbury Street Church as it is today

Recent changes to our Tetbury Street Buildings

In 2014, during Revd Liam Eaglestone's ministry (2007 –) we made a few changes to both the Church and Church Centre buildings. In the Centre we created a bigger church office in what had formerly been the Ford Lounge, reconfigured some of the upstairs rooms to create better spaces for our children's work and refurbished the kitchen and toilets. In the Church we converted the kitchen into a meeting room.



Painting by Cliff Bonnett, 2008

Using The Hub

By 2010 we needed more and different space for our growing church's midweek and Sunday activities. So we rented a large room from a local charity and launched our Together @ 10 worship time. Today the Hub is well used by our church and the local community.



Our church today

250 years on we are blessed to have three ministers and a thriving, active church with people of all ages.



Tom Elliott
(Youth Minister)



Our Minister, Liam Eaglestone with his wife Kate (our Children's Minister) and their four children, Molly, Billy, Jack and Jessie

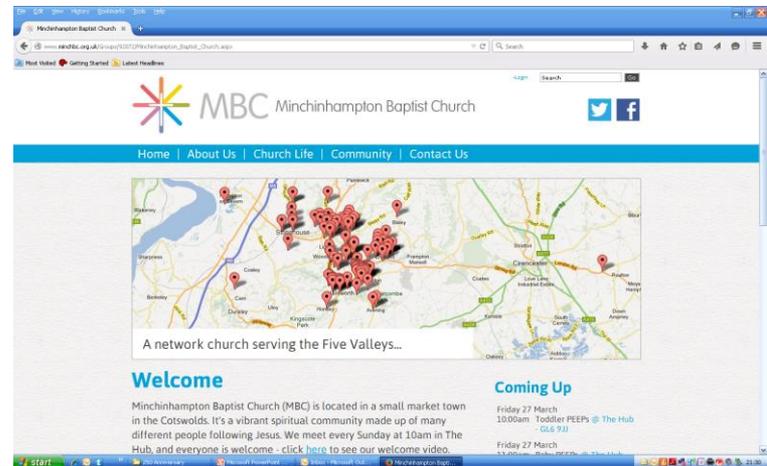


Our church today

We are developing satellite groups that serve people in the Five Valleys, meeting their current needs and bringing them closer to God. As we do this we are mindful of his word:

“Unless the Lord builds the house, the work of the builders is wasted.”

Psalms 127:1 (NLT)



www.minchbc.org.uk



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Our church is thriving thanks to the generosity of others who have given themselves and their resources over the years. So at this special time we are choosing to bless others through 250 acts of kindness to local people and a donation to a modern-day church plant in Swindon.



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#250actsofkindness



Coffee and cake given to teachers and teaching assistants



Brownies given out at the Surgery



50 hampers given out to residents at George Pearce House



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