

A BRIEF HISTORY

A brief history of Christ Church, Oswestry, as a Congregational and then URC Church

The 16th and 17th centuries were times of debate in England concerning the nature and government of the Church. Sadly many Church people disagreed over who should be the Head of the Church, the need for Bishops, and a common prayer book. One such group, the Congregationalists, founded a Church at Sweeney Hall, just outside Oswestry town, in 1651.

The restoration of Charles the Second in 1666 led to an Act of Uniformity which required all ministers to follow - conform to - the Book of Common Prayer. Many refused to do so and lost their livings. Further troubles followed but eventually the state agreed to let Non-Conformists to meet for worship in specially licensed places. Oswestry's Congregationalists, who had been meeting since 1651 - secretly in private houses for worship -were granted a royal licence in 1672 by King Charles, for the use of rooms in the house of one Hugh Edwards for public worship and devotion. A copy of this licence is on display in the Church.

The church flourished, and moved to new premises, now the Butcher's Arms public house, just 7 years later. By the end of the 1740's it was again necessary to look for new premises. Land was bought in Arthur St and a chapel built, which again was outgrown, having to be at first enlarged and finally replaced by an entirely new building - the present Church building - in 1872. Christ Church, as it was newly named, being opened for worship on Friday the 18th October, 1872.

In 1830 Christ Church was one of the first provincial churches to join the new Congregational Union and in 1972 voted to join the United Reformed Church - a union of the Congregational and English Presbyterian Churches.

During its Congregational years, Christ Church acted as a beacon for the gospel in Oswestry and district, helping to call other churches into being. In the 1980's some of these returned home to their mother church, viz: Maesbury Chapel in 1985 and then Trefonen Chapel in 1986 closed and transferred their fellowship to Christ Church. These were sad occasions but also glad for history would show that the Lord was working through these events to strengthen Christ Church as she faced a severe challenge of faith, for in 1984 a survey of the Church building advised that the roof was unsafe and recommended that the building should cease to be used! The Church however refused to accept closure and the people rallied to the cause to overcome great challenges to organise and finance the necessary repairs and maintain the church in being. During this time of disrepair the church community fell in numbers but grew in love. Worship in the hall helped to bond the people together and to God's glory the Church was rededicated for use on 16th January 1988. This was the prelude to a decade of growth.

With thanks and acknowledgment to '*Challenge: The history and background of Christ Church Oswestry*', Elizabeth Carless and Beryl Evans-Higgins. [1992] [copies for sale on request]