

## CHAPTER 24

### Ministry at Barley Chapel

The centenary of the building was celebrated on 25th June 1942 during the ministry of Rev.G. Hobson, and was hailed as a fine example of the spirit of unity which existed in Barley between the Chapel and the Parish Church (represented by two local clergy). The Provincial Moderator and County Union secretary attended.

The church secretary, Miss Frances Wilkerson, wrote a brief history of the Chapel and gave a cheque to Mr. Hobson to mark the 25th anniversary of his ministry there, together with an engrossed list of subscribers. Addresses were delivered by the Moderator and the Union secretary.

The succeeding minister, Rev. Frederick Oliver, had married just before settling in Barley. He was very likeable and joined in all village functions. He and his wife acted as Sunday School superintendant for many years with a roll of 40 children. The School met on Sunday mornings and afternoons, many children attending on both occasions. The vestry and schoolroom were used in addition to the sanctuary, and had to be heated by coal fires.

The main adult Service was held on Sunday evening (afternoon in winter), but a midweek Service was also held.

In the early 1950's the brass lamps were replaced by electric light, but throughout its history the Chapel had no drinking water on the premises. This had to be brought from the nearby cottages. Rainwater was used for heating purposes.

Many laymen conducted worship at the Chapel, as for example, Mr. Fred Prescott, a colporteur for the British and Foreign Bible Society who carried his stock of Bibles on his bicycle and was renowned for startling illustrations. On market days he had a stall in Royston and Cambridge.

A Mr. and Mrs. Brown kept a convalescent home in Barley, and regularly brought patients who swelled the congregation by occupying two whole pews. Likewise Mr. Walter Doggett, a local farmer and lay preacher, encouraged German prisoners-of-war working on his farm to accompany him.

Chapel members were adept at raising money, holding a yearly fete and a bazaar in Barley Townhouse. Internally, there was a silver tree, Gift Day and a Freewill Offering Scheme.

Rev. Frederick Greaves was meticulous for visiting people in Barley on Thursdays, this practice fitting in well with the local bus service. He had married for a second time just before coming to Barley, his wife Lilian being some 20 years younger and experienced in conducting worship.

Rev. David King could always be recognised by the rusty bicycle which he used for visiting, and his practice of calling on his congregation quite late at night. The vigour of Rev. David Buckle was greatly admired, and he was an especial favourite amongst the Sunday School children.

Steady interest was taken in Barley activities by Rev. Constance Payne, who retained good relations with the Parish Church. United Services were held each month alternately between the two churches, and Mr. Fred King often preached in the Parish Church. During her ministry, the Chapel readily agreed to become part of the United Reformed Church.

Similar help was given by Rev. Clifford Taylor, who called at every house in Barley in an effort to revive the life of the Chapel, which had declined considerably, but this aroused little interest.

It had now become all too apparent that the ageing congregation were finding it very difficult to keep going, and a special Church Meeting was held on 28th March 1984 to discuss the future of the church. The meeting was led by officers of the URC District Council.

It was firstly recalled that the members of Barley Chapel had come to a conclusion in the previous November that the Chapel would have to close, but there was a strong desire for the graveyard to remain in use.

A resolution was passed that 'Great Chishill and Barley URC ceases to use the church building at Barley at some future date not before 17th June 1984, such date to be agreed between the congregation and the Trustees'.

A large number of abstentions in the vote reflected the sadness that the building was being closed but a realisation that the action was inevitable.

The last regular Service was held on 17th June 1984, led by Rev. Gillian Jones, but on special occasions Services were held after that date. Membership was transferred to several other churches, but particularly Great Chishill URC.