

CHAPTER 3

Rev. John Nicholls (1694 - 1740)

Soon afterwards, Mr. Nicholls began to preach in the open air to as many as were prepared to hear the simple truths of the Christian Gospel. He attached himself to the growing body of Dissenters, and was introduced to the pastoral office at Chishill, where the congregation had obtained a licence to use a barn in May Street for religious worship.

The followers were scattered throughout many of the adjoining villages, and it was thought advisable to license a building also at Melbourn. A Church was formed on the Independent plan, with part assembling in Chishill and part in Melbourn, and this pattern continued until 1745, when they separated.

Mr. Nicholls was called to be minister of both Independent churches in 1694, conducting worship at each on alternate Sundays.

About the year 1700, a building (later made into a meeting-house) and 15 rod of ground were purchased by Mr. Nicholls for the congregation at Chishill, and made over in trust to them .

In a little while the congregation increased so much that the building needed to be enlarged. This was a source of great consolation to Mr. Nicholls, for he writes in a work entitled 'Dedication of the Method of Grace' (1730) :

'It hath been sometimes no small joy to me the thought of our joyful meeting in the bright morning of the Resurrection, you will be my joy and crown before our Lord Jesus Christ at His appearing, that I have not run in vain, nor laboured in vain among you'.

Mr. Nicholls appears to have been a solid, judicious pastor. He was described as being in sentiment strictly Calvinistic, and in discipline strictly Independent. In advancing years, he was assisted by a Rev. Peachey who later accepted the pastorate at Clavering, and by a young assistant Leonard Fisher.

Under his ministry, the church was left in prosperous circumstances when he retired in 1735, and he died in about 1740, being interred in the meeting-house but without any memorial stone.